THE BARBARIAN AND THE BULLPEN!

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Friends of Ol' Marvel

Hey there, sports-fans, welcome to F.O.O.M.'s frantic fourteenth issue, spotlighting Marvel's first—and foremost—barbarian, Robert E. Howard's classic creation: **Conan.**

There; I said it.

Y'see, folks, this editorial wasn't always meant to come out, the way it's coming out now. Originally, it was supposed to be a humorous, slightly tongue-in-cheek/names-changed-to-protect-the-guilty recounting of a day not too long ago when ye youthful F.O.O.M.-ic editor—namely me—was still holding down the fort as former Editor-in-Chief *Marv Wolfman's* Associate Editor (with me so far?). It started out as a day much like any other day...that is, until this six-foot-plus, deadly-as-all-get-out dude in a fur loincloth—sporting the *biggest* broadsword any of us in the bullpen had ever even conceived of, let alone seen before— kind of burst into the Marvel offices, demanding (with appropriately wild eyes and ferocious mein) to see the editor in charge of F.O.O.M. Everyone immediately hid under their desks. So this guy hefted his sword and cleaved *Scott Edelman's* desk in, as the saying goes, twain.

Scott yelled for help—or tried to, until the guy tapped him with the sword again—and someone tried to get Marv, who is very good at this sort of thing, to throw this kook out of the office. Trouble was, Marv had just decided to go to lunch. Quickly. On the way out, though, he whispered that I—as his trusted number-two man—could throw this wacko out of the office for him.

Which was just great, y'know?

The guy dropped Scott and leaned forward on his sword, this dangerous glint in his eye, steely edge in his voice, and asked why we hadn't done an article on him in F.O.O.M. Or, better yet, a cover feature. He wanted a spread in F.O.O.M. or—yet another threat left hanging. Say, next issue. No good, I replied, *Daredevil's* already booked into that one.

Wrong move, pal, but a quick recovery staved off disaster. As the sword moved towards me, I shouted: "But you can have the very next issue after that!" The sword stopped, the guy considering the situation for a moment; then, he nodded, said that would do, and left.

Marv came back from lunch, congratulated me on the way I'd handled our intruder, and Jolly *Sol Brodsky*—Marvel's Keeper of the Kash—stuck his head in the door and wondered who was gonna pay for all the wrecked furniture?

Which left me with an issue to put out; *this* issue. But, like I said, I'm not going to tell you that story. For one thing, there isn't space. When the issue was set up, we found that we had so much dynamite stuff to bring you that we very nearly didn't have room to fit it all; hence, the postponement for yet another issue of some features we'd meant to start *this* issue (bear with us, folks; we'll get it right eventually). But the stuff we do have...

Hoooo *boy!*

To begin with, a magnificent cover by Conan-artist supreme *John Buscema*, inked by *Tom Palmer*. Secondly, an unprecedented twelve-page article by *Ralph Macchio* (one-time letterhack turned Marvel black-and-white Associate Editor) that combines an in-depth fact piece on Conan—detailing his life and times, with some commentary thrown in for free—with a major interview with Conan-writer and one-time Marvel Editor-in-Chief *Roy Thomas*. We have a mini-biography of Conan's creator, *Robert E. Howard*, and a feature on Howard's first creation, *King Kull*, by writers *Skip Kirkland* and *Howard Zimmerman*. And, finally, a piece on *Red Sonja* by Marvel staffer *Naomi Basner*. Plus, the second edition of the Buscema Art School Page, spotlighting the talents of the neo-comic artists studying with John Buscema. Plus, that old, reliable—though somewhat truncated this issue—Department of Infoomation, wherein we present an interview with neo-Editor-in-Chief *Archie Goodwin*, and some general news. (For detailed news of upcoming titles, check out the Marvel Checklist in the individual books). And, for the completists among you, we present a Conan Checklist of our own, listing the titles published by Marvel—to date—of the color Conan, Kull and Red Sonja titles.

And, finally, we have a back cover of *King Kull* done by the lady who made that book great: *Marie Severin*. That, alone, is worth the price of admission.

So, that's it; F.O.O.M. #14, in all its glory. Try it, folks. Who knows, you might like it, and, perhaps, come back for more. If you do, we'll be here waitin' for you.

Take care...

chris claremont

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PROLOGUE: "KNOW, O PRINCE, THAT BETWEEN THE YEARS WHEN THE OCEANS DRANK ATLANTIS AND THE GLEAMING CITIES, AND THE YEARS OF THE RISE OF THE SONS OF ARYAS, THERE WAS AN AGE UNDREAMED-OF, WHEN SHINING KINGDOMS LAY SPREAD ACROSS THE WORLD LIKE BLUE MANTLES THE STARS. HITHER CAME...
CONAN the CIMMERIAN
"--BLACK-HAIRED, SULLEN-EYED, SWORD IN HAND, A THIEF, A REAVER, A SLAYER, WITH GIGANTIC MELANCHOLIES AND GIGANTIC MIRTH, TO TREAD THE JEWELED THRONES OF THE EARTH UNDER HIS SANDALED FEET.
prologue by
ROBERT E. HOWARD
ROY THOMAS
JOHN BUSCEMA
& YONG MONTANO
PLUS:
THOMAS SPEAKS!
by Ralph Macchio
If anyone tells you that Sword-and-Sorcery has taken comicdom by storm—tell 'em they're full of Zamboulian stallion droppings. If the aforementioned genre had indeed made its indelible mark on comics, we wouldn't have had the numerous failures of so many barbarian lookalikes to carve out a place for themselves in the cutthroat comics' marketplace. Consider for a moment these lusty worthies: *Beowulf*, *Fafhrd* and the *Grey Mouser*, *Iron Jaw*, *Stalker*, *Warlord*, *Wulf*, *Thongor*, and *Kull*. What do they all have in common besides eye-catching nomenclature? It's simple, really. All of them within the last several years have made their appearance in the four-color medium and have since disappeared as if they were being chased by a horde of Shadizar-birthed devil bats. Of course, sales are not the only reason for the

demise of a certain title, and Marvel's own Kull and Thongor had substantially increased in popularity in the final few issues before the demise of their books, with Kull even winning enough support to give the Atlantean emigrant another crack at his own magazine, not to mention at wresting the Valusian crown back from the usurper Thulsa Doom (no relation to Victor Von—we hope).

If barbaric, or pseudo-barbaric fiction hasn't exactly been packing the stands (newsstands,that is), then what is this article all about? It's about the one character who—for reasons we'll examine—has been able to carve out a place for himself in the hearts and minds of the readership.

Into that fearful arena, circa 1970, there stepped a wild-maned savage from the dusky dawn of time, whose name was to become synonymous with Sword-and-Sorcery derring-do in comics: *Conan the Barbarian*.

CONAN has been blessed as few series in comics history have. In its sixty-three issue legend, there has been but one writer and two artists laboring to produce it. It has further been blessed by having one of the industry's most capable writers and two of its most dynamic, though diverse, pencillers chart the book's development. These three men (with a variety of inkers) have taken Conan through successive periods of maturation—though at the time of this writing, he is just entering his mid-twenties and the pirate/plunderer stage of his life. But Conan has seen a good deal more adventure in his young existence than most of us will ever see in the cloistered confines of urban or rural America. To show you just how much activity and danger can be crammed into twenty-three-odd years—if you know the right people—we're going to present an overview of Conan's comic book life, hopefully touching all the major highpoints of the past along with a quick, though prophetic, view into the future. And so, with broadsword in hand we plunge headlong through the mists of time, where "an age undreamed of" awaits us.

First issues of any comic mag are difficult things to write; doubly so, when that issue introduces a new-to-comics concept. To be sure, Sword-and-Sorcery had popped up here and there in comics, both at Marvel and elsewhere, before Conan came on the scene. But never before had a major figure from that fabulous realm been whisked from the safety of the printed page into the more deadly waters of fickle comic book distribution. What's more, the first issue hit the stand with as little fanfare as was possible. The "Bullpen Bulletins" page, normally the place for announcing new Marvel comics, had stated on it, rather laconically: "CONAN THE BARBARIAN debuts this month. Miss it at your own risk.", which is hardly the Twenty-one Gun Salute normally accorded new titles. (One wonders why so little attention was drawn to

CONAN on the eve of his debut, unless the Powers-that-Were at Marvel didn't feel it stood much chance of surviving, and was therefore not worth the effort of advertising it.)

CONAN # 1 did appear despite the lack of blaring trumpets, and it was presented by *Roy Thomas*, writer—whose name even six years ago had graced the credits' box of many of the finest Marvel comics produced since 1966. In other words, Roy's name was a familiar one to the mass of comic book buyers, and that was a plus in CONAN's favor. The artistic credits listed one *Barry Smith* as penciller, which seemed, at first glance, to be a different matter entirely. In the few years he'd been working very infrequently in comics, Barry had done a few issues of DAREDEVIL, the AVENGERS, and the X-MEN, which were not much to speak of. Although the layouts in terms of storytelling were slightly interesting, the figures of men in motion resembled what *Jack Kirby* might do if he were forced to draw with his left hand.

With this first issue of CONAN, though, Barry had shed much of the Kirby influence, though he still had miles to go in honing and defining his own unique style. Roy himself has stated in the past that he was not entirely pleased with the first issue and had Barry redraw the splash page, while he (Roy) did some careful editing to the latter half of the story, to help enhance the build-up to the book's climax. These changes are anything but uncommon occurrences in comics, so don't get the mistaken idea that Roy and Barry had one of those failures to communicate we so often hear about. For the initial try, the team of Thomas/Smith left the handwriting on the wall for those perceptive enough to see it. Thomas and Smith were onto something good, and it remained only for a fastidious readership to pick up on it.

They did.

The book went on to chronicle Conan's adventures through the first important period of his life, the barbarian/thief phase. Roy and Barry began to adapt a number of the earliest tales from the Conan Canon with a watchful eye towards chronology, Roy continuing to exhibit the virtuosity that had made him one of the foremost scripters in the field, as the "Marvel Conan" was more and more fully fleshed out and the strident cries of vilifying critics were, for the most part, silenced. Roy had not only done his part in successfully transplanting Conan into this visual medium, with its essential character intact, he had added a certain quality to Conan's personality which distinguished him from Howard's barbarian. Although much of the primitive brutishness remained, Roy's Conan was a thinking being; there was a cerebral aspect, still in its nascent stage, which added a feeling of sensitivity to the Cimmerian which could allow tragic and horrible aftermath of a battle he had participated in ("The Frost Giant's Daughter"—issue #16); and to grow world weary while just out of his teens and long for the touch of innocence in the form of Mala, a woman whose genuine beauty he needed more passionately that the wiles of any tavern wench ("Night of the Dark God" SAVAGE TALES #4). This extra dimension of character was accomplished subtly, as such things must be, and allowed for Conan to be seen as very much a product of his rugged age; though still a figure able to rise above the blood and gore with an almost absurd melancholy.

In an important way, Roy's Conan is very much like we are. We do what we must to survive, and in less cogitative moments, even convince ourselves that this is what we were born to do anyway. But within most men, there resides a profound melancholia that sometimes drifts to the surface during the oddest moments, which prompts us to see ourselves in a more truthful light. And so it is with Marvel's Conan. I've a hunch our barbarian is going to make one heck of

an Aquilonian king.

Within this first period of Conan's comic book life, Barry Smith progressed as both a fine artist and storyteller, until the point where he had garnered a legion of fans who mourned when he departed the series after issue twenty-four. Graphically, Barry created a vision of the Hyborian Age which was uniquely his own. As seen through Barry's pencils, Conan's world was a glimmering expanse of desert-spawned cities, with crystalline towers glinting in pale moonlight. The aura of physical decadence was equal to that shown in the Hyborian Age paintings of *Frank Frazetta*, but with a marked difference. There was an exquisite air of delicacy, of gossamer fragility, that made this reader almost afraid to turn the page lest the movement cause those haunting structures to shatter into multicolored fragments. And the actual storytelling improved dramatically with each issue. Roy had apparently given the young Britisher ample latitude within the framework of the plot to be visually innovative, and Barry picked up the reins and flew. CONAN soon became one of the most visually distinctive magazines in the Marvel Age, and Barry Smith became closely associated with the character, even returning to re-color a number of Conan's earliest adventures when they were reprinted in several issues of GIANT-SIZE CONAN. And when Barry left the book, who would have thought another "only" artist for Conan could have ever been found.

The Thomas/Smith collaboration lasted some twenty-two issues in the color comic (CONAN #'s 17 & 18 were pencilled by *Gil Kane)* and it produced a goodly amount of landmark stories, not all of them direct adaptations of Howard's "Conan" stories. Issue three's "Twilight of the Grim, Grey God" stylishly set the stage for the grafting of *non*-Conan stories written by Robert E. Howard into the Conan Legend Roy Thomas was building.

Roy also had no shortage of his own plotlines bobbing around inside his head for the sun-bronzed Cimmerian, and so, many of the color stories—both earlier and later—were original tales not ostensibly inspired by any Howard material, Conan or otherwise. A fine example of this was issue seven's well received "Devil-Wings Over Shadizar," notable also for the betrayal Conan suffered at the hands of the wench, Jenna, who stole his small heart of gold and left him flat on the desert sands. But Jenna was to return several issues later and remain with Conan to share a few adventures with him much the same as was a certain Red Sonja to subsequently do after she'd had her laughs bopping the Hyborian Age's mightiest hero around. Conan was to learn much of life before he donned that shiny Aquilonian armor some twenty years hence, and he was going to learn it the hard way.

Issue eleven was an extended adaptation of Howard's "Rogue's in the House" tale (which was a Conan yarn both in its original and adapted form for you completists out there). This gem seemed to be archtypical of the entire first series of Marvel-Conan comics, having all the classic elements any decent Sword-and-Sorcery story was supposed to have, right down to the impenetrable tower and the obligatory, hideous creature lurking somewhere within. But truth to tell, if there was a fault, however minor, in those early issues it was perhaps an unfortunate, though necessary, repetition of those classic devices a bit too often. I say necessary because Conan did spend much of his wandering youth poking around in places he had no business being, looking for an easy satchel of loot; and most of those places proved to be guarded obelisks. The stories were absorbing reading to be sure, and some, such as issue four's "Tower of the Elephant" with the pitiable though ultimately trimphant Yag-Kosha—plus the previously mentioned "Rogues"—rate among the best of the Thomas/Smith teamups. But it was time for Conan to begin to move out of his temple-robbing period and move into the second important phase of his life, that of a mercenary soldier in the awesome "Hyrkanian War" series which spanned some seven issues—beginning with number nineteen and concluding with twenty-six. This major turning point in Conan's life came when he was picked up by a Turanian war-galley and was given time to reflect on the past events of his short life. You could almost heart the creaking of the wood as Conan stared out over the prow

of the ship and pondered: "Here among men called civilized, a stranger may smile and extend one hand while the other strains furtively for the hidden dagger." (issue 19, page 12) Like Hamlet, Conan was learning—the hard way.

"The Hyrkanian War" was not an adaptation but an original, multi-part story by Roy and Barry, who, as a team, reached their zenith with this Homeric saga. Conan himself actually switched sides (choosing the losers) and became a defender of the beseiged city of Makkalet, which like its "real" war-torn counterpart, Troy, was doomed. The nature of the sin committed by the two cities was identical: theft; but the objects of removal varied. Troy was sacked for stealing the most beautiful woman in the world; Makkalet for absconding with a Mongoloid imbecile masquerading as a god. Ya pays yer money and ya takes yer cherce.

Red Sonja was introduced into Conan's life in issue twenty-three, while Barry Smith walked out of it the following month, finishing up his stay with an award-winning issue. It was now left to Roy and new CONAN artist, *John Buscema*—with whom Roy had collaborated over many of the finest AVENGERS' epics—to finish the great war. To say the least, it was a radical changover of art styles, for Buscema is from the action-oriented school of comics storytelling; Barry Smith was not. It was soon evident that John's visual approach to Conan and the Hyborian Age would take some getting used to, though in the long run it has proven no less satisfying for its more gritty, barbaric perspective. *Ernie Chua* took over the inking with issue twenty-six and lent the pencils an even more savage appeal which stood as an obvious counterpoint to the more meticulous detail of Barry Smith. And if sales were an indicator, CONAN—whether due to increased Marvel-style action in the book, or Buscema's pencilling having a greater mass drawing power—rose even further in the ranks of Marvel's top-selling comics.

With the conclusion of the Hyrkanian War, Roy seemed to feel the readership had had enough of complex epics for awhile, and the next nineteen issues featured mainly single or two-part stories, which were held together by Conan's continuing attempts to become a mercenary soldier-for-hire. In issue twenty-nine, he forsook his wandering ways for a bit to take up arms with the Turanian Army under King Yildez and Prince Yezdigerd, whom he'd fought against and scarred for life in the recent past.

While under Turanian employ, Conan goes on a special mission for King Yildez into the land of Khitai, which formed the outline of the three-part adaptation of *Norvell Page's* FLAME WINDS novel, which fit snugly into the Conan Canon. Our barbarian even picked up a small friend along the way, the somewhat less than

trustworthy Bourtai, otherwise known as the J. Carroll Nash of the Hyborian Age. Bourtai's sly antics were a welcome counter to Conan's sullen nature, though, unfortunately, he was killed in issue thirty-five while plying his trade as sneak-thief. Three issues later, Conan deserted the Turanian forces and headed toward Zamora, City of Thieves—which doesn't exactly sound like the ideal tourist stopover.

(Interestingly, as an aside, one wonders where the Hyborian peoples *did* go for vacations, if they went at all. With such places as Shadizar the Wicked and others of its epithet-ridden ilk abounding, and brigands along the roads linking the major cities, the average Hyborian must have stayed pretty close to home turf—which makes the survival of Conan all the more remarkable considering his wandering ways. Reflect on it while we return to our regularly scheduled article.)

While travelling towards Zamora, Conan is sidetracked into two beautifully illustrated adventures, both pencilled and inked by John Buscema: "Warrior and the Were-Woman" and "Dragon from the Inland Sea," which further established Big John's reputation for lean, solid storytelling. From there, Roy sent the Cimmerian through several more short adventures —even a two-parter with the rambunctious Red Sonja, who repaid Conan's manly overtures this second time by cracking him on the head and then making her escape on horseback. Like we said, that man just has to learn the hard way.

In issue forty-five Conan found himself back in Shadizar, where some four years before he had sojourned briefly as a young thief. This was the last complete-in-one-issue tale we would be treated to for some time, as the following issue Roy embarked on an adaptation of *Gardner Fox's* Bellmont novel, KOTHAR AND THE CONJURER'S CURSE. This was the first many-part epic in quite awhile, but, unfortunately, this serial did not live up to the standards previously set—and if letters' pages are any indication, most of the fans were not happy with the progress of the novel. Put simply, on all counts, the next six issues just didn't cut it. The plot, with its plethora of background material, was fairly complex, and was made none the simpler by a verbal maze of hopelessly confusing names which sounded more like Australian vegetables than far-flung fantasy concepts. (If you doubt me, just see how comfortable it feels to say: "Pass me the Zoqquanor and sprinkle on a little Themas Herklar while you're at it."; any more questions?) Graphically, the adaptation suffered with the loss of Ernie Chua as inker and his replacement by *Dick Giordano* in issue #48. Although Dick is one of the best craftsmen in the business, his style just didn't mesh with Buscema's to create that all-important ambience of barbaric power. This is not to say the story was a failure; rather that the amount of work which had to be put into it by the reader to extract any real pleasure was somehow just not worth the effort. All creative endeavors have their ups and downs, and this was definitely a valley.

Things picked up quite a bit in issue fifty-two, as both Roy and John (aided now by new inker *Tom Palmer*) put on their artistic mountain climbing shoes and lifted CONAN out of its small depression with an original four-part story that was swashbuckling adventure at its best. The Cimmerian's good, right sword arm is put to use once again, this time under the tutelage and command of Murilo, the nobleman Conan encountered in his adventure with the Red Priest in Corinthia (as chronicled in issue eight). Murilo, ever the dashing gentleman, teaches Conan the finer points of swordsmanship and fixes him up with a new helmet and mail shirt; not to mention two charming and most unlikely companions: the impish young acrobat, Tara of Hanumar, and Yusef, who was to fall in love with her a short time later. Murilo was the chief of a troop of mercenary carousers called the Crimson Company, which owed its allegiance only to the highest bidder.

Following this superlative saga, Conan becomes separated from Murilo's troop, as well as his two companions—Tara and Yusef—in Messantia, the capitol of Argos. He is forced to flee the city alone, and in issue fifty-eight, begins a new facet in his life, that of a mercenary, sea-going pirate under the beautiful buccaneer-ess Belit —who was to play so major a role in young Conan's life over the few years. And that brings us up to the "present," which I'll leave to Roy the unravelling out of in the future.

There is another side to Conan's popularity in the graphic story medium, and that involves Marvel's attempts to establish a firm foothold in the black-and-white magazine format. The first attempt of the House of Ideas to expand into this new, untried market came with the presentation of SAVAGE TALES # 1. As Roy himself has said, it was a beautiful package, featuring several characters—Conan, Man-Thing, and Ka-Zar—who were to go on and become great successes in the color field. Unfortunately, distribution and display —the twin bogeymen of all comics publishers—rose up even uglier than before, meaning that the first issue of S.T. might just as easily have been found squeezed in between HOUSE BEAUTIFUL and TRUE DETECTIVE, if it could be found at all. In fact, distribution was so poor on that first issue that it has become one of the most treasured of collectors' items—owing in part to its being a first issue, but more so because it was almost impossible to locate. Marvel took its first hesitant step into this new arena and almost wound up having its corporate foot taken off.

Some two and a half years after the first distribution disaster (1973), SAVAGE TALES #2 was released, and this time, the magazine was almost totally devoted to Robert E. Howard and his creative offspring. Roy and Barry Smith began their magnificent two-part adaptation of one of the longest "Conan" stories, "Red Nails." There were several fine articles, including the informative "Probable Outline of Conan's Career" by *P. Schuyler Miller* and *John D. Clark*, both admirers of Howard and occasional contributors to WEIRD TALES, where Conan originally appeared years ago. There was more, but you get the

idea—it was a classy piece of merchandise.

The lapse of time between the second and third issue was less than between first and second. A scant four months went by, at which time SAVAGE TALES #3 was published, and it featured the conclusion to "Red Nails" and various and sundry other items, including an editorial by Roy Thomas in which he stated that "The issue of SAVAGE TALES you hold in your hands is quite possibly the last—again." At this point we're sure it's becoming evident to even the most casual reader that this magazine was having more ups and downs than dirty pants on a scrub-board. To be perfectly fair, though, the major reason for the large gaps between the last two issues of S.T. was to allow Roy and Stan to gauge the audience response.

Apparently, sales were high enough on that third issue to warrant continuation of the title; and so, several months later, S.T. three went to the newsstands, again headlining a major tale of Conan at his best, as well as a reprint of one of Roy and Barry's earlier collaborations from the color CONAN, "The Dweller in the Dark." There were a couple of articles tossed in for the more than nominally interested reader, and viola, another fine piece of work. SAVAGE TALES may have had an uneven publishing record, but the quality of the magazine cannot be faulted; it was consistent throughout. SAVAGE TALES #5 was the last issue of that book to feature Conan, as the following issue, Marvel's jungle king, Ka-Zar, took over.

The following month, Conan lovers everywhere must have hit the Hyborian ceiling upon going to their newsstand and seeing, a spanking new, eighty-two page magazine, entitled, THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN. Conan had conquered the pulps, the comics, and now he was an A-1 hit in the previously murky morass of black-and-white magazine publication. Roy's editorial promised us—with Hyperborean Oath—that this new book would feature Conan, Conan, and more Conan. And that's how it's been for the past eleven issues, to the delight of sword-wielders the world over.

For the most part, the SAVAGE SWORD "Conan" tales have been mammoth adaptations of Robert E. Howard's original works, which have come off spectacularly well because the extended page count leaves room for true plot and character development, as well as powerful visuals. John Buscema has been the main artistic force of this new magazine—as he has been for some time now in the color CONAN—though the diversity of inkers, especially *Alfredo Alcala*, have given a wholly different look to the art. Yet the awesome strength of Buscema's figures has always remained. Perhaps the most radically different "Conan" story yet attempted was in issue six. Written by Roy and taken from a short story by Howard, it was illustrated by Philippine artist, *Alex Nino*, whose graphic layouts and highly stylized approach made the story memorable, if nothing else.

Aside from the exceptional stories starring Conan, SAVAGE SWORD has been a fanciers dream, with multi-part, in-depth articles on the history of Sword-and-Sorcery, the religions of the Hyborian Age, trade routes of the period, and even portfolios of "Conan" artwork by some of the most respected artists in or out of comics. Gil Kane's much-heralded contribution to the S & S genre, BLACKMARK, had its first book serialized in the first four issues of SAVAGE SWORD, and Roy Thomas and Walt Simonson have since begun a massive, graphic adaptation of Howard's own essay on the world he created: "The Hyborian Age." In these inflation-inflicted times, a dollar isn't all that easy to come by. But if you're a Marvel fanatic or blood-and-guts fantasy connoisseur, there are worse ways to lose your money.

Conan's life in the pulps, paperbacks, comics, and finally black-and-white magazines has been one rather phenomenal success story; and with the possibility of a full-length movie, yet another medium may come under the spell of the stalwart Cimmerian. There are reasons aplenty why Conan seems to be the unrivalled spokesman for Sword and Sorcery fiction, but Roy Thomas himself may have said it best when he stated on a letters' page that it's really the character himself—and no particular writer or artist—who so perfectly captures the flavor of his mist-shrouded time and the spirit of Man at a barbaric crossroads.

But above all, Conan is a loner, a towering figure of mirth and melancholia, who always seems strangely apart from the world he inhabits, looking at it with detached amusement one moment, with a sickness of the heart the next. This is not an idle exercise in sympathy, for Conan was hardly more sinned against than sinning, but there is a basis for kinship that the reader comes to share with this sullen giant as his literary appeal begins to take hold on his audience. There are characters who in terms of textbook accuracy, are perhaps more "consistent" in behavior, yet so few have the almost physical stage-presence necessary to become creatures of myth. To survive in a barbaric world, one must become barbaric in both manner and aspect, mutilating when provoked, killing when attacked. But to lose oneself in a barbaric world, and to lose sight of oneself in the process, is to suffer defeat at the hands of blind circumstance. If Conan was all things in his day, then he was also master of his fate and chooser of his destiny regardless of the mouthings of ancient hags and oracles. He would grasp the scepter of kingship if Fate presented him the proper conditions, but *he* would make the choice. Aye, he would make the choice, so he believed. And so do we believe.

Crom be with you.*

*This article is respectfully dedicated to Roy Thomas, for having the courage of his commitment, and the determination to turn a personal dream into a painstaking reality.

an exclusive interview with Roy Thomas, the man behind Marvel's Conan by Ralph Macchio

FOOM: The logical first question to ask is where your original inspiration came from to transpose Conan from paperbacks and pulp magazines into the comic medium; and what were the problems you encountered during and initially after the transposition process?

ROY THOMAS: The original inspiration, really, were a lot of letters written in by fans that came to Stan's and my attention. A number of possibilities were mentioned in them, such as Doc Savage, Conan, the Burroughs' material, and Tolkien's work. All of these were in vogue in the late sixties, and all were connected with the fantasy and pulp revival, of which Conan was a combination of the two. Marvel was deciding to do either Conan or some other sort of sword-and-sorcery thing. I had read barely a word of that kind of fantasy at the time. I had bought two or three of the paperbacks, read a few pages from one story, and then put them in the closet, and that was it for a year or two.

FOOM: Weren't there other characters being mentioned before Conan came up?

ROY: Thongor and Kull were the first two we considered, and *Lin Carter's* THONGOR AND THE CITY OF MAGICIANS was the first sword and sorcery book I'd ever read. It had a Frank Frazetta cover of Thongor riding on the back of a pterodactyl—which coincidentally, I later bought and is the only painting by Frazetta I own. Stan preferred the name Thongor to Conan, so we began negotiations, but there was a communications problem between us and Lin Carter's agent. In the meantime, I contacted *Glenn Lord* (executor of the Howard estate), discovered that Conan was indeed available, and we made the deal very quickly. And later, of course, we did Kull and Thongor as well.

FOOM: Did the legal restrictions prohibiting Marvel from adapting the Conan stories by *Lin Carter* and *L. Sprague De Camp* cause any difficulties in your overall plotting of the barbarian's potential future?

ROY: It makes it more difficult, because I have to do alternative versions of certain stories, filling gaps, sometimes people think are better, sometimes worse. There was some variance even between Carter and

De Camp as to whether we had the right to do their stories. Carter felt that the one story of Howard's that he had finished, "The Hand of Nergal" he did have the right to sell us, and *Björn Nyberg* felt likewise about his, but De Camp didn't feel he could.

FOOM: Is there any chance these restrictions may be eased in the near future?

ROY: De Camp would at least entertain some sort of an offer, if the suit which I think he, in connection with Glenn Lord, have launched against Lancer Books is ever settled; but I don't know what stage that's in right now. There's no terribly bad blood or good blood between me and De Camp at this time.

FOOM: I sense a certain ambivalence in your attitude towards De Camp which occasionally comes across when you mention him on the letters' pages.

ROY: Not unfavorably, I hope. I think that in many cases he's mentioned rather favorably or neutrally because he's become associated with Conan. I printed both letters that liked his material; and very rarely, the large number of letters that we get that seems to be growing, which seems not to like it. But I think that I would do all the De Camp stories, even the ones we've done alternative versions to, if we were able to. It saves me work for one thing; besides, they've now been published in thousands of paperback copies, though to me, they are no more valid than my own comic book contributions. I have to mention that the Carter, De Camp, Nyberg stories are no more valid than the Marvel version, because none of them were done by Conan's creator, so therefore one is as good as the other. And the idea that Carter or De Camp have some vested interest, or are some great crusaders, is as ridiculous as if I said I was the reincarnation of Robert E. Howard, which I would never claim. I merely hog all the work. (Laughter)

FOOM: Barry Smith and John Buscema have different approaches to visual storytelling, at least that's how it appears to me as a reader. Could you describe the difference in your approach toward working out a Conan story with each of these artists?

ROY: Those approaches even varied within the time limitations. For example: in the beginning, I gave Barry very detailed synopses. On a story like "Tower of the Elephant," that was even a complete Howard story, I wrote a four to six page synopsis, suggesting particular panel sequences, etc., and even rearranging the order of several panels Barry did. Later, it got to the point where I would give him less, and as we got used to working together, some of the plot would be verbal. If it was an adaptation, it might be almost nothing.

With John Buscema, too, it varied. I usually give him a fairly full plot, and when he's doing an adaptation, quite often I'll tell him where to break the story, and mention one or two other things I'd like changed; for instance, putting Conan in a couple of places, whatever, and that's about it. It varies from a full synopsis to a brief discussion.

FOOM: And that depends on the type of story.

ROY: Right, on the type story—original or adaptation—and various things like that. If it was an original story, though, I gave each of them, generally speaking, a several page plot; although in a couple of cases, Barry and I talked it out somewhat. The difference in Barry's and John's approaches aside from the art—which is so obvious—is that Barry almost made a hobby out of doing CONAN, while John draws three times as fast, (and does other work, besides—Ed.) though he is still very interested in it. He claims it's the only thing in comics he's ever really enjoyed doing.

The other main difference in approach is that with Barry—and this is not a criticism of John—with Barry, for better or for worse, usually for better, I got back more than I gave him in many cases. Which is one of the reasons why the strip had more subtleties in certain areas. Now with John, the strip has less subtlety because he gives me back exactly what I give him in plot. In many ways, I feel the material I do with John is closer to Howard's rather unsubtle Conan, but both artists are interesting.

Barry and I were discussing the whole thing just the other night and were mentioning the fact that our Conan was not terribly much like Howard's Conan; at least there were considerable differences in terms of nuance, subtlety, and sensitivity of the character. It was not so much Howard's Conan we were doing as sort of an interpretation thereof. And the idea that either Barry, Gil Kane, Buscema, or anybody else is "*The*" interpreter of Howard—even Frazetta—is ludicrous to me. In terms of that, the book sold pretty well under both Barry and John, but it sold the best, generally speaking, under Buscema. The best selling of the early issues were the Gil Kane-drawn stories, although the later CONAN issues, like the "Song of Red Sonja," sold pretty well, too.

FOOM: So as far as you're concerned there is no "The" artist for Conan.

ROY: Exactly, but if there was one at this stage, it would be Frazetta; and even he kept changing the face on the characters. He could never quite decide what Conan's face looked like.

FOOM: I've always felt Frazetta made him too barbaric looking.

ROY: There was never a description of Conan's face really. So you never knew that he was necessarily brutish and ugly-looking. Some people said he should be more handsome, and others say he's too ugly. That's the whole problem with putting anything down, whether it be Conan, THE LORD OF THE RINGS, Tarzan, etc; once you put something down in cold black-and-white, people can begin to pick it to pieces because it did not match the image they saw in their own mind.

FOOM: It's typical of Marvel to take characters who are not initially successful and return them to active status at a later date, totally revamped. Now after repeated failures to get Conan off the ground in the black-and-white medium, why did you continue to try, knowing that Conan could not be revamped or restyled without losing the essence of Robert E. Howard's creative thrust?

ROY: Well, we didn't really have any bad luck with Conan in the black-and-white medium, except for SAVAGE TALES #1, which had less to do with Conan than it did with—

FOOM: The other characters.

ROY: No, not the other characters either. The main thing had to do with various factors such as distribution; and even some things that were almost in litigation, including possible sabotage by forces outside the company. The result of all this being that the magazine had very poor distribution. It did sell reasonably well where it *was* distributed; however, it was denied access entirely to Canada and several other places. The next try was SAVAGE TALES #2, a couple of years later, and it was enormously successful; but we had a circulation man who had no faith in Conan because of SAVAGE TALES #1, so he misread what the sales figures meant.

You sometimes get a sort of "bottom

line" mentality which cannot look *into* the figures; all they want to know is the bottom line. What the numbers add up to is just fine, but unless you know how to interpret it, unless you know what the variables are, it could be a hindrance. Actually, very few accountants have ever created anything, and though they're invaluable, they're largely interchangeable.

FOOM: Has the lack of Comics Code restrictions on the black-and-white SAVAGE TALES and SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN made any measurable difference in your protrayal of the character of the Hyborian Age in general, when contrasted with the way things are shown in the color book?

ROY: Well, perhaps that's more for somebody else to judge than myself. We, of course, go for a little more illustrative look in the art for one thing. There are minor restrictions; we go a little further with nudity and sexual innuendo—but not very much—and with violence; but again, not very much. But there is more bloodletting, like the beginning of the latest story, "The Haunters of Castle Crimson" in SAVAGE SWORD #12, because it's the sacking of an entire town. There were whole pages that would never have gotten into a color comic. When we recently reprinted the Jim Starlin story from SAVAGE TALES #5 into the color CONAN (issue 64), we had to cut out a sex sequence that was rather mild, but it was suggestive. It's a percentage really. We could go much further in the black-and-white than we do, but we don't want to have any kinds of problems with any possible markets turning down the black-and-whites, with the result that ours are much milder than *Jim Warren's*. That's a conscious choice on our part.

FOOM: As far as I'm concerned, you're almost solely responsible for making the comics buying public sword-and-sorcery conscious—

ROY: I'm not going to argue with you there. (Laughter)

FOOM: And your work has, shall we say, "inspired" other companies to release imitations, which for the most part have failed. Has the immense popularity of Conan in comics had an effect on the paperback sales of the Lancer/Conan series?

ROY: I had this foggy notion that it might have in the few areas where it's been displayed, but since the paperback books were largely out of print by the time they became a success, I think it would help enormously if they could be published again. There was a deal for Bantam to do them but that's still tied up in litigation.

I would agree that while the initial success was a combination of the Howard fiction with the Frazetta covers, the comics have made hundreds of thousands of people aware of the books; in the meantime, the Conan-comics audience has grown up six years, and they're now ready for paperback books. If the paperbacks come out, I think the publisher will find as big a market, if not bigger, than there was in the late sixties.

FOOM: Is there a continual comparison in the letters you receive between your dealings with the character of Conan and those of Carter and De Camp?

ROY: Less and less as the Lancer books go out of print, though there are still the same diehards writing in and trying to get me to change the spelling of Red Sonja back to a "Y", and other earth-shattering matters that rank about thirteenth in importance on a list of ten, to me.

FOOM: Do you see Conan's widespread appeal to a large cross-section of the comics audience in terms of, say, tastefully handled sex and violence; or do you feel the character and the world he inhabits are representative of something deeper and more enduring in the human psyche—that when handled well, can't help but be appealing to people?

ROY: I think the latter would be the truth to me. Conan draws heavily, though in many cases unconsciously, on that part of Howard which was steeped in myth. Howard was very influenced by Irish mythology, but I've looked in vain for references in any of his writings to the legends of Cuchulain, the Irish hero, whose stories could easily have been turned into Conan stories. In fact, there are several characters named Conan in Irish legend and lore. I think that Conan strikes a deep chord in people, and touches greatly on hidden fears we all have of the unknown and the unknowable. The character in part represents a desire to have enough strength to cut your way through anything, like the old Alexander the Great solution to the Gordian Knot. You don't try to untie it; you just take your sword and whack the hell out of it, cut it in two and then go on to something else.

FOOM: I've noticed a difference which comes across between your Conan and Howard's. Your barbarian seems to be somewhat more sensitive and intelligent.

ROY: Well, this is partly due to my own nature in terms of the way *I* would write the character, but I wouldn't claim to be more sensitive than Howard. Part of that grew out of the early twenty or thirty issues that I did with Barry, which got me into a certain style of writing; and some of that was bound to carry off, partly because it was natural to me, and partly because it became established. There were things for example, like having nipples on the male figure, which were not generally done in comics before Conan and became part of it all. After Barry did them, I insisted that other artists like John Buscema and Gil Kane include them, even though they were reluctant to do so, or kept forgetting them. Sometimes I'd draw them on myself if the artist had forgotten, or have them added to a whole book not because I thought it was terribly important, but it was a consistency that kept the book being all of a piece.

FOOM: Has it affected you in any way to be doing stories of Conan in his younger days concurrently with tales of Conan when he was king of Aquilonia? Do you write each differently?

ROY: Well, Conan was partly written differently by Howard. For example, the CONAN THE CONQUERER adaptation which appeared in GIANT-SIZE CONAN is the only thing that's come out yet of him as king. The whole CONAN THE CONQUERER novel was written in a much more—to use somebody else's term—*Arthurian* style than the earlier Conan stories, probably because of the fact that Conan was a king. Howard was a very eclectic, erratic writer, and he would occasionally change his style—which is nothing new in any kind of pulp writing. My own writing of Conan under different artists has changed. If I was writing a story of Conan as king, I would make him a little more noble, and figure by the age of forty or so

he'd become a little more civilized than he was. Personally, I prefer him at his earliest, most barbaric stages. I prefer to think of him in his early twenties, just out of being a thief at this stage, and becoming a pirate, which isn't much better. He's aging at the same rate in the regular comic that he would in real life, although we made him look somewhat older because people aged faster in those days. I suppose, he's really about twenty-two or twenty-three in the color book.

FOOM: Let me assume that Conan con-

tinues to be very successful in both black-and-white and color mediums. Do you ever envision a point where you'll say, creatively and artistically, I have done what I wanted with the character? I have brought him up to the age in the color book that he is in the black-and-white book and now I just want to end it? Do you ever picture yourself saying that?

ROY: At the rate I'm going, it would take twenty years to bring the color CONAN up to the point where CONAN THE CONQUERER picks up. I don't have to think that far ahead, and I certainly don't intend to. On the other hand, there might come a time when I can no longer do anything terribly new with the character and maybe you might benefit from having somebody else doing a story; but I figure the heck with it, I'm going to continue to do it until I get tired of the character, or until it seems to no longer be selling under me. Then I feel it would really benefit from someone else doing it.

At this point, I feel I've earned the right to do Conan as long as I want to. And when I look back at the eighteen or twenty stories of varying lengths that Robert E. Howard did, then I've written—if not necessarily more words—more actual scenes and so forth. And when you consider how repetitive his own stories were—

FOOM: Especially the later ones.

ROY: Yes. Actually, once the first few Conan's were over, CONAN THE CONQUERER was virtually a rebuilding of two or three of Howard's earlier stories. There were really only about four or five Conan stories, basically, and only a very small handful of those are any good. While I figure that I wouldn't deny the guy his talent, in many ways he had carried Conan as far as he could go by the time he'd left, and the character was almost stale with him.

FOOM: So you don't take as gospel what many people do, pertaining to Howard's suicide, that had he lived, he would have gone on to write Conan stories dwarfing those he'd already put on paper?

ROY: The original story—and this is true up to a point—was that Howard had given up writing fantasy fiction about a year before he died because of non-payment by the magazine. However, Glenn Lord discovered in the last few years a story, with a rather Egyptian sounding title, which although set, supposedly, in America at the time of the Conquistadores, was definitely a fantasy story. It was half completed—and drifted into synopsis in the end—so Howard was going back to fantasy. Had WEIRD TALES, which owed him a thousand or so dollars at the time he died—which was like five or ten thousand today—gone back to paying him and wanted more stories, I think Howard would have continued to write them. WEIRD TALES had a backlog of stories and they weren't paying even upon publication, which sent him into trying to write for other markets. As long as he had a market for fantasy, he had no other alternative. If Howard left Conan, he couldn't have been sure he'd come up with something as successful, and generally speaking, he was not nearly so successful with his other characters.

FOOM: Do you think that in a sense the Kull stories were better written than the Conan stories?

ROY: They were better written than the average Conan story probably, at least the two or three that were published—and maybe the one or two others that weren't. I don't think that any of the material written is better than say, "The Tower of the Elephant," in particular—

FOOM: Which is your favorite.

ROY: Which is my favorite, and there are one or two others which have really good scenes in them, and though I do think the

Kull stories were beautifully written, they were a very moody kind of fantasy which had very little of the barbarian thing. What's interesting to me is why he didn't just take Kull and put him back to his barbarian days, instead of making it Conan. I'm not sure if it was a desire to get a different bunch of names than the one he'd already used, or because he felt he'd shot his wad on Kull, and was afraid of being associated with it anymore. There's nothing in writing that I have seen or heard that indicates why he just didn't take Kull and go back, because his first two stories of Conan were of Conan as a king, just as Kull was.

FOOM: Right, and isn't "The Phoenix and the Sword" more or less a retelling of "By this Axe I Rule"?

ROY: Yes; and the "Phoenix and the Sword" is coming out as the CONAN ANNUAL this year, which contains a reprinting of the article which that explains how that was changed from the Kull story entitled "By this Axe I Rule," which was not published until the late sixties. I tried to tie them together by showing King Kull in the Conan story slightly, as if it were history repeating itself. There was no other way to get around the fact that we had already done the story, at least in part, about a year or two ago in Kull's own comic.

FOOM: It is intriguing wondering why Conan became the success Kull never did, and to that end, Robert E. Howard had expressed in private correspondance with fellow writers that the Conan stories almost seemed to write themselves, and further, that he could almost tangibly sense the character standing over his typewriter mentally dictating to him the events of Conan's life. I was wondering, have you at any time since you've begun to script CONAN some six years ago, had anything that you could describe as a semi-mystical rapport or a mind-lock with either Howard himself or a Conan or Conanesque figure?

ROY: I'd love to have some colorful story, but unfortunately, much as I love doing CONAN more than most things I've done in comics—maybe more than anything—the only time I felt anything strange was about the time I began to script it, which was about the age of thirty, almost at exactly the same age that Howard killed himself. That was kind of a strange feeling, the coincidence of it. In fact, someone said about L. Sprague De Camp—it was *Damon Knight*, I think—that the trouble with De Camp's stories—which had begun to come out in Gnome Press Editions—was that De Camp was too sane to write this kind of thing, while Howard, being the kind of twisted, if sensitive, intelligent person that he was, did sort of believe it. I consider myself in-between. I don't consider myself a better writer than either of the two gentlemen. L. Sprague De Camp is a very talented writer, but he is not intense enough to me for Conan. He writes too lightly, too much. I take it more seriously than De Camp is ever able to, but nowhere near as seriously as Howard did; or I would not be alive at this stage probably.

FOOM: So you have never had anything approaching any semi-mystical experience in your tenure on CONAN?

ROY: No. I don't believe in mystical experience, only strange things in the mind. I don't believe in mysticism at all. Astrology, numerology, to me there's no reality in any of it. Sometimes, somebody accidentally hits on some truth, but it usually is not the truth he thinks it is.

FOOM: How do you account for the fact that Howard did mention in private corres-

pondance that for weeks on end he could write nothing but Conan?

ROY: The mind does play strange tricks on one, and he's not the first writer or artist of any kind who had an obsession. Many of the best writers have this feeling that they just have to write, they have to get it out of them. Other writers, like myself, find it hard to sit down at a typewriter. It really depends on your point of view; and to me, the fun thing is to make up a concept, or to envision a plotline and what you want to do with it. To actually sit down and write it, becomes a drag to me. I would rather listen to records or go out to a movie, or do several things we can't mention in FOOM. (laughter)

FOOM: As far as writing Conan in particular, and anything in comics in general, do you consider your best writing to come from inspiration or from a very meticulously worked-out plot? Do you believe that the moment of inspiration, if it comes before writing out a story, is what's responsible for your best writing?

ROY: It's really a combination, because of course, I often plot the stories over quite a long time, and the plotting depends on whatever relationship I have with the artist. If he's gotten inspired or done a particularly good job, it will in turn inspire me, and that is the advantage I have, and that Marvel writers in general have if they work with good artists. There is a cross-fertilization back and forth that works very well, so even when the initial moment of inspiration is gone, when I see how the artist has rendered the work, it can get up my enthusiasm, and when that works out the best, that's when things are really clicking. That was the reason I did enjoy the best of the work I've done with John Buscema, Barry Smith, and Gil Kane. When I would see what they would do with a storyline, whether it was mine or Howard's, it would inspire me all over again. Sometimes, not always. (Laughter)

FOOM: Do you feel that your favorite Howard-Conan stories, like "Tower of the Elephant" have also become your best comics adaptations?

ROY: I certainly think that "Tower of the Elephant" was one of the best adaptations, and for the most part the adaptations are the things that interest me the most, though occasionally, there's an original story that just clicks right. For example, "Devil Wings over Shadizar," which Barry and I did in one of our earliest and still best issues. We took a very nothing story that Howard did called "The God in the Bowl," and Barry and I reworked it one night for an hour or two in a London hotel lobby, waving our hands about and probably bothering the other people there. It was one of our very best efforts that was half original and half adaptation, which at this stage I have to force myself to remember which was which, though I know that I like our finished story better than Howard's.

FOOM: Often when I look back over previous issues of CONAN, I come across such lines on the Splash Page as "Inspired in part by a poem by Robert E. Howard," or a phrase or word of Howard's.

ROY: A lot of this was just carrying on what De Camp and other people began. You cannibalize the stuff—

FOOM: Speaking of writers taking from writers, will any scripter at Marvel ever be allowed to put words in the mouth of Conan so long as one Roy Thomas feels able to continue?

FOOM: Marvel could decide legally at any stage to take the character away from me, and though I have something pertaining to that in my contract, one can get around such things if one really works at it. I don't think they'd be likely to do it so as long as the book's selling, and by the time they might, I'd probably have done it myself. When I get tired of CONAN, then I'll give it up.

I originally intended to do two or three issues and then the heck with it, but I just got to liking it. I'll be quite frank, it's almost easier for me to do the book because I've handled it for so long, and that's both good and bad in terms of writing the character. The plots may come as hard as they always have, but certain situations write themselves. I've got a lot of adaptations to do, which while they take the same amount of time, are easier to get started on when you're not very inspired.

As I've said, I feel I've earned the right to do those as well as other stories. If at some point I decided I was going to leave the company—which I have no intention of doing—I would immediately adapt all the stories in the next year or two and would enjoy myself, leaving it to someone else to pick the bones.

But for the most part, I still enjoy it, though I'm aware of the fact that it gets harder and harder to do things which are new to Conan because of such things as Howard's own repetition and the framework within which each story must conform to, generally. I could always bring science-fiction into it, which I have from time to time touched on as did Howard in "Tower of the Elephant." That recent story in SAVAGE SWORD #11, "Abode of the Damned," in which I took an old Howard tale and worked in the three strangers and was like a Sodom and Gomorrah, atomic blast kind of yarn, was science fiction in a sense, and that's as close as I want to come. I could bring all sorts of things into

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the series such as real astrology, real witchcraft, etc , but to me that would be changing the character more, and thus I'm always trying to find ways to do things without violating what Howard basically intended in the kind of stories he did

Of course, that gets harder and harder to do all the time, and so I've ended up doing some stories recently that don't have much sorcery in them at all For example, my Amra story in a recent issue of the color book, was more of a Tarzan kind of thing, and the only sorcery in it to amount to anything was the vague, mystical connection between Amra and a certain lion

FOOM: Several years ago, in the color title, you and Barry did a two-part story plotted by *Michael Moorcock*, featuring his Elric character, that had in it certain unlikely elements for a Conan tale I believe it was to be Barry's swan song on the strip, wasn't it?

ROY: Barry had at least three swan songs that I know of on Conan "Song of Red Sonja " the second half of the Elric adaptation you're talking about, and "Red Nails which we did originally in SAVAGE TALES With the Elric story, in the second half, where Conan rides off, Barry had suggested more dialogue than usual, and I used a lot of it because it was to be his last thing on the series, and besides, Barry has a nice, sensitive feel for things And if I tell him exactly what to draw, sometimes panel by panel, or as in "Tower of the Elephant" as I've said, change the order of certain panels, then I don't mind his suggesting dialogue to me, and if I like it, I'll use it He doesn't credit me when I tell him what to draw, and I don't credit him when he tells me what to write, and that's true with a lot of other artists too

FOOM: Didn't you receive a number of complaints from people who felt the Elric story was turning CONAN into a cosmic series?

ROY: Yes, because Conan really didn't fit into that story, but that was the point of the whole thing, and I wouldn't have done another like it Some people didn't like that two-parter, and I don't think we were entirely successful I simplified the plot I was given by Michael Moorcock and *James Cawthorn* somewhat, to help fit it in the required space, and because I couldn't understand what the hell was going on myself in a lot of places It was a little *too* different, and we didn't want to do it as a general rule, but once in awhile, you have to break the mold a little bit

The problem is the same thing that happened to the FANTASTIC FOUR in 1965 or 1966, with the coming of Galactus Once you've fought God, which is basically what Galactus was, how do you go back to the other stuff? And everything since then to me, or almost everything on that book —even good things that came afterwards like the Inhumans—has been ten years of a rather competent anti-climax There are some strips that just naturally climax at a certain point and anything you do afterward can still be good and saleable and go on forever—

FOOM: But you've said what you have to say, really

ROY: Exactly Howard had said what he had to say Jazz and rock musicians often have contributed everything they have to within a short period of time *Louis Armstrong*, by the time he was in his early twenties had made his, and one of my own idols, *Elvis Presley* by twenty-one—after three or four records—had made a huge imprint upon pop music forever Presley could've died the next day and his whole thing would've been done, because in the last twenty years it's all been kind of a repetition which you either like or don't like With Howard, three or four Conan stories, and sword-and-sorcery was kind of created And if Howard hadn't gone on with it, that would have been his contribution

FOOM: The genre would have continued without him

ROY: Yes

FOOM: Were you surprised at Conan's success in both the color and black-and-white mediums?

ROY: Yes I was discussing that with *Stan Lee* this morning, and he was mentioning that while CONAN'S sales and print-run were reasonably good—it's still one of the top half-dozen or so books—there was a time briefly, when John Buscema was doing full pencils, that the book was even more popular John has recently returned to full pencils which I think will help Stan seems to feel the book has more popularity in it than I do, basically I reminded him that when we first put the book out, we were looking for survival, and we've done somewhat better than that We have a character that between the color title and the black-and-white probably makes more money in original material than most of the characters around, especially if you don't count reprints because we don't reprint as much of CONAN due to its relative newness

I've always considered that there were about two-and-a-half good eras in which to set a comic, and that's generally been true of the field The present, which of course changes every year, is one; and so is the post Civil War West, which is the general period of the Rawhide Kid or just about any western comic, with rare exceptions like a Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett fad Strangely enough, World War II is another popular era, as long as the strip seems to be set in Europe, and in certain situations Nobody had ever tried super-hero comics much before Stan's CAPTAIN AMERICA series, and later came the INVADERS by me

But generally, the historical or mythical type of comics of which type CONAN is sort of a combination of, has not done well in most cases National's VIKING PRINCE was the biggest success of its type before CONAN It was a sometimes sword-and-sorcery book which lasted several years, at a time when it had no real competition, and that was a pretty moderate success, compared to what other books were doing at the time, It obviously just barely managed to hang on

FOOM: That leads me to wonder where your audience comes from?

ROY: Out of the walls, man, I don't know where they come from (laughter) No, really, I can look at the letters and see you have the same kind of wide spectrum you have in the other books The audience is probably a little bit older on the average, but you still have a lot of very young readers who just get off on Conan fighting with a sword and the monsters, etc , which are all the things Howard obviously got off on WEIRD TALES probably had an adolescent audience, though we think of it now as a venerated old magazine, its average reader was probably only slightly older than the comic book audience People who I know had read the pulp magazines in the old days usually said they started reading them at age ten or eleven, only slightly older than maybe the average comic reader If you consider the Marvel Comics, maybe our average reader is the same age, as opposed to say, myself; I began reading BATMAN at the

age of five. You can't read SPIDER-MAN as well in the regular book at five as I could read BATMAN years ago, because the books are more adolescent as opposed to juvenile now in a certain way. It's a kind of complex thing, but there's a whole wide spectrum in the readership, with everybody participating from children to college students to people out of college.

FOOM: Do you think most of your readers on CONAN were previously comic book readers, or do you think a lot of them followed you from Lancer's CONAN paperbacks?

ROY: Most of the Marvel/CONAN readers are comic book readers. Very few people followed us from Lancer or the book wouldn't have had such a terribly spotty start. We had a good first issue sale, based on a little bit of the paperback and a little bit of hype and promotion on our part, and then it went precipitously down for seven issues in a row, until it finally bottomed out and jumped up quite a bit when we changed to the things we felt more secure with, and stopped doing things we'd originally decided on like animal menaces and such. Sales picked up when we started doing more humanoid menaces like skeletons in armor, giant winged men, and things of this sort. At that point CONAN jumped up five or six points and from then on it was at least a moderate seller. Sales jumped up a bit with the couple of issues by Gil Kane, and some of Barry's later issues sold well, though not as well as Gil's two issues. I originally thought sales went up immediately under John Buscema, but it turned out later that those were not finals and I actually dropped a little from that one high for about two or three issues, and then it quickly passed up the levels that Barry had reached, keeping most of the people who had read Barry's CONAN, and gaining readers who felt that Barry's work was a little too quiet or delicate. We lost a very small amount of readers but we picked up thousands.

FOOM: Do you think most of the readers of the color CONAN have followed you over into the black-and-white SAVAGE SWORD?

ROY: I think that most of the people who read the one read the other. Of course it's not as many on the black-and-white because it's more expensive and the distribution is different. Some people just don't have the money to spend on the larger magazine, and some people don't want to fool around with the color comic. I know of people, one in particular—a friend of mine—who cannot bring herself to read a Conan story in the black-and-white book, although she is a very big fan of the Conan color comic. I keep telling her that the stories in the black-and-white—being Howard adaptations in many cases and longer stories—are in my opinion my better work. But that's only my opinion and that depends on the month, too, in some cases. So other people say the color comic is nothing but the black-and-white to them is all the good stuff. It really depends on who you ask at any given stage.

I like the black-and-white page size, the reproduction, and so forth; and what I would really like to see is that size book in color, because I don't care much for black-and-white comics in general, and I hate the lousy, little thirty-two page comics we do now. If and when we do something with a bigger page size and in color, maybe comics would finally make some kind of breakthrough and get out of the ghetto they're in right now.

FOOM: Do you think that CONAN would lead the way?

ROY: I think it would be one of several things that *could* lead the way if they would work at it. You could do several other Marvel characters, including Spider-Man in a different sort of way, or you might try it with Howard the Duck or a new character; it's all in how you handle the character. Conan could be handled badly for a year and it would be gone because it's a more delicate kind of success than Spider-Man who would be harder to kill at this point. CONAN has been a fairly considerable success the past few years, but it wouldn't take too long to flush the whole thing down the drain, because if it wasn't handled just right it would lose everything.

I may have substituted one thing for another when Barry left and John Buscema took over, but I was consciously doing it, and with some control. If suddenly, I was working with an inferior artist, or I lost all interest in it, or maybe even started being self-indulgent, it would get less like Howard's character and become a whole different book. All of a sudden, a title that was doing very well would just go down the drain. It's happened before to comics and it could happen again. Bill Gaines always says that the E.C. science fiction comics, as they got better and better in the later years, sold more poorly. When they got more mature and substituted psychological endings for monster endings the sales went down.

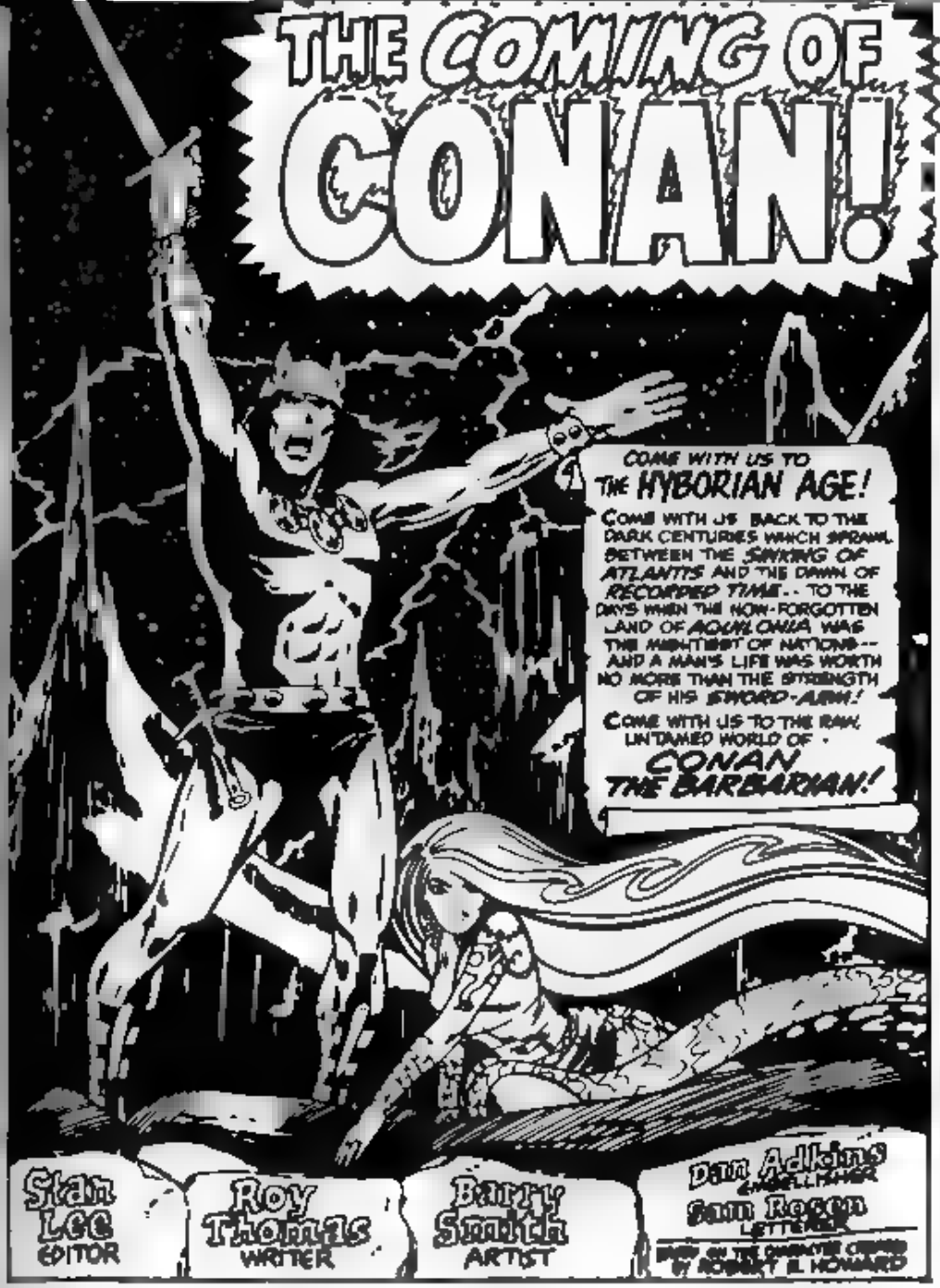
FOOM: What does that say to you about your audience?

ROY: It says that the audience is young, they like visual excitement, and they are not dumb, by any means. They're neither as bright as we want them to be sometimes nor as dumb as we'd like them to be.

FOOM: How do you feel about Conan and the Hyborian World being grafted onto the Marvel Universe, opening up possibilities for Spider-Man team-ups and the like?

ROY: I wouldn't want to see any team-ups, but generally I do like to see everything tied together, and I feel that our version of Conan is in the Marvel Universe, which is something we've sort of touched on peripherally. Still, we want to keep them separate, and really, I don't want Conan to meet the other characters.

FOOM: Roy, thank you very much for the information and your time. ■


THE COMING OF CONAN!
COME WITH US TO THE HYBORIAN AGE!
COME WITH US BACK TO THE DARK CENTURIES WHICH SPRAWL BETWEEN THE SINKING OF ATLANTIS AND THE DAWN OF RECORDED TIME -- TO THE DAYS WHEN THE NOW-FORGOTTEN LAND OF AQUILONIA WAS THE MIGHTIEST OF NATIONS -- AND A MAN'S LIFE WAS WORTH NO MORE THAN THE STRENGTH OF HIS SWORD-ARM!
COME WITH US TO THE RAW, UNTAMED WORLD OF CONAN THE BARBARIAN!
Stan Lee EDITOR
Roy Thomas WRITER
Barry Smith ARTIST
Dan Adkins & Sam Rosen
BASED ON THE CHARACTER CREATED BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

By Skip Kirkland

"Give me a clean sword and a clean foe to flesh it in. Damnation! What would I not give for a flagon of wine!"1

Robert Ervin Howard was born January 22, 1906, (an Aquarian), in Peaster, Texas—a small town located some 45 miles west of Fort Worth. His parents were rugged pioneers, embodying the frontier spirit of the age in which they lived. Over the years, they'd lived in South, East and West Texas, as well as in Oklahoma, and they had finally settled back in the "Lone Star State" in the town of Cross Plains. Howard's father, Dr Isaac Mordecai Howard, becoming the local travelling physician.

Howard received his formal education in Texas. He attended grammar schools in Bagwell, Cross Cut and Burkett; and completed his high-school career at Cross Plains, Brownwood High School and Howard Payne Academy. He then attended Howard Payne College until he elected to leave school in order to pursue a career in free-lance writing.

Although Howard didn't begin to write until he was fifteen years old, many of his swashbuckling adventures and heroes were germinating in his fertile imagination during his early school years: i.e. *El Borak* (Francis Xavier Gordon), the hero of "The Daughter of Erlik Khan"—conceived at age ten; and *Bran Mak Morn*, the Pictish chieftain—conceived at age thirteen

ROBERT E. HOWARD:

THE MAN WHO CREATED CONAN!

In the fall of 1924, while he was still a student at Howard Payne College, Howard made his first sale. The story was entitled "Spear and Fang," and it involved an imaginary conflict between the Cro-Magnon and the Neanderthals; it was purchased by WEIRD TALES magazine, thereby making its young author all of $16.00 richer. However, in a few years time, Mr. Howard then in his late twenties, was earning more money—all from his writing—than any other man in Cross Plains, "including the town banker."[2]

In his youth, Robert E. Howard saw first-hand the civilizing of the great American Southwest. He witnessed the settling of the lower Rio Grande valley and the taming of the great Plains. He experienced the rise of the Central West Texas oil industry, and the wild and wooly boom towns which followed in its wake. All of which conspired to create a deep love for the traditions, history and folkways of the Southwest in Howard's young, romantic heart.

However, Howard's pride, respect and loyalty to his homeland did not in the least retard the scope of his intellectual and literary pursuits. He performed extensive historical research in such diverse fields as the prehistoric history and culture of Ireland and Great Britain, as well as the ancient Oriental and African worlds—not to mention his native American Southwest. His prodigious scholarship in these fields and others enabled him to spice his most exotic literary projects with one of the most necessary ingredients in all great myths and legends—a grain of truth.

Howard was a lover of the vigorous and hearty "out-of-doors" lifestyle—as is evidenced by his idolization of *Jack London*, a writer whose works held in reverence the natural splendor of the unspoiled wilderness. During his life, Robert Howard travelled extensively throughout the Southwest and Old Mexico and he delighted in sending letters to his friends describing the historical legacy of each region he visited.

He was not, however, born with the robust and masculine constitution which he would later reflect in his writings, for

> As a boy, Howard's precocious intellect made him something of a misfit, especially in Texas. For a time he suffered the bullying that is the usual lot of brilliant but puny boys. Partly as a result, he became a sport and exercise fanatic and an accomplished boxer and horseman. That soon ended the bullying.[3]

An excerpt from an article written by *Alvin Earl Perry* in 1935, while Howard was still alive, describes this "brilliant but puny boy's" dimensions as a mature adult:

> Physically, Mr. Howard is a remarkable man. He stands almost six feet, is a decided brunette but for his blue eyes, rather heavily built, has a 45 inch chest, is 17 inches about the neck and perhaps 37 at the belt. And, he says "no one ever accused me of being handsome."[4]

In his prime, his weight averaged between a muscular 195 and 200 lbs., so one can well imagine that with his dark complexion and his blue eyes, he must have more than closely resembled his most famous creation, *Conan the Barbarian*.

In temperment, Robert E. Howard "was introverted, unconventional, moody and hot-tempered, given to emotional extremes and violent likes and dislikes."[5] Politically, he was liberal, "and a bitter foe of civic injustice in every form."[6] Again, we turn to Alvin Perry's article for an insight into Howard's personal tastes:

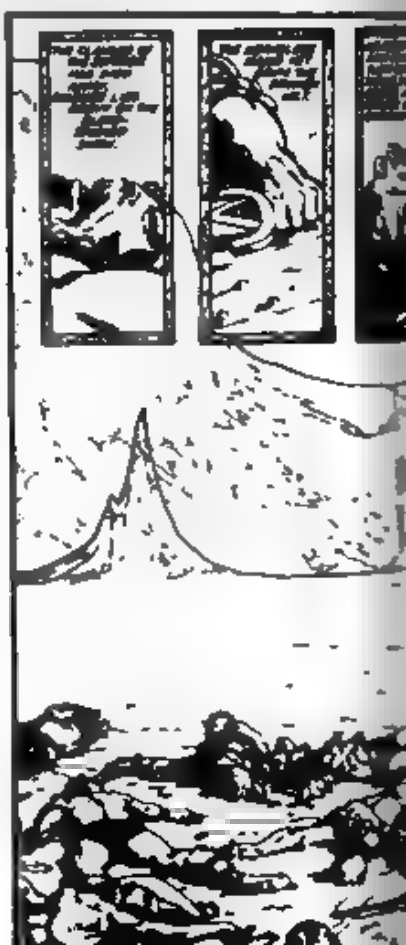
> he prefers tequila to brandy, beef to pork, and likes his eggs fried hard. Jack Benny and Gracie Allen are his air idols, while Lionel Barrymore and Edna May Oliver hold his attention in the movies.[7]

Although he disdained from associating himself with any clique of effete and spuriously "arty" literary pretentions, and was staunchily opposed to the "modernist" movement in the literature of his day, Howard corresponded at great length with other authors in the field of "heroic fantasy." *Clark Ashton Smith*, *H.P. Lovecraft* and *E. Hoffmann Price* were but three of his illustrious pen-pals.[8]

For the best biographical record of this prolific author's potent and virile spirit, one need look no further than the many characters depicted in Howard's vivid and exciting epics: *King Kull*, *Solomon Kane*, and *Conan the Cimmerian*, to name just a few. They were archetypal heroes of the "old school": lusty, elemental men and women, whose characters and accomplishments were equaled only by the strength of their backs and the breadth of their desires; each one bearing the indelible imprint of Mr. Howard's own indomitable essence:

> He was, above everything else, a lover of the simpler, older world of barbarian and pioneer days, when courage and strength took the place of subtlety and stratagem, and when a hardy, fearless race battled and bled, and asked no quarter from hostile nature. All his stories reflect this philosophy, and derive from it a vitality found in few of his contemporaries.[9]

His heroes were concocted from the best and the worst characteristics of gentlemen whom Howard had met in his travels: gunmen and oil field bullies, common workmen, gamblers and bootleggers. They strode, irrepressibly, through the myriad, incredible worlds of Howard's imaginings, worlds of ancient, supernatural beauty and terror, wherein humankind's inherent dread of the unknown skulked—often in human guise, but more often in horrific subhuman and amorphous forms dredged up from the deepest and most fear-filled pits of our collective unconscious.



The title spread from CONAN #16, "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"

Since his tragic and untimely death in 1936, few writers have been able to rival Howard's entrancing, headlong style of "actionist" writing. Poet, historian, author, Robert E. Howard was an artist who took his craft seriously and who continues to maintain an ever-increasing following of devoted fans—an honor bestowed upon but a precious few writers. He has, through Conan and his surly brethren, carved a very dear piece of real estate in the imaginations of all those whom he has touched through his writings. The library of Robert E. Howard has been presented to his alma mater, Howard Payne College, where it serves as the basis of a Robert E. Howard Memorial Collection of letters, manuscripts and books.

"'I didn't drown with my crew,' answered Conan. "'Twill take a bigger ocean than that one to drown me.'"[10]

CHRONOLOGY

1906. Robert Ervin Howard is born, January 22, to Dr Isaac Mordecai and Mrs Hester Jane (Ervin) Howard in Peaster, Texas

1921. At the age of 15, young Robert decides that writing is to be his profession

1924 Howard places his first story, "Spear and Fang," for publication while still attending Howard Payne College in Brownwood, Texas.

1925: "Spear and Fang' is published in the July issue of **Weird Tales** magazine.

1926 Begins the last and most prolific decade of his career His novelette **Wolfshead**, is published in April, again in Weird Tales He achieves through this story wider exposure and acclaim

1928· Mr Howard begins chronicling the exploits of Solomon Kane, a 16th century English Puritan duelist of world-wide escapades The first of his stories appears in the August **Weird Tales** under the title, "Red Shadows "

1929 **The Shadow Kingdom** series begins in the August issue of Weird Tales, introducing King Kull of Atlantis to our post-historic world

1931 Howard's story "The Children of the Night" receives a Class II rating in the O'Henry Memoria Prize Annual.

1932 The story "The Black Stone" appears in an English anthology, **Not at Night.**

1932 In November, "Worms of the Earth," the chilling saga of Bran Mak Morn, the Pictish chieftan is begun in **Weird Tales.**

1932· In the December issue of the same magazine "The Phoenix on the Sword," the first of the tales of King Conan the Cimmerian appears

1932. Two of his poems are included in **Modern America Poetry**

1936 Howard dies, June 11

1938· Tract, "The Hyborian Age," is published posthumously in fanzine **The Phantagraph**

OTHER CHARACTERS Sailor Steve Costigan, Kid Allison, the Breckenridge Elkins, Turlough O'Brien

OTHER PUBLICATIONS **Ghost Stories, Fight Stories, Argosy, Oriental Stories, Action Stories, Sport Story, Strange Tales, Magic Carpet, Texaco Star, Frontier Times, Coleman Voice, The Ring, American Poet, Strange Detective Stories, Jack Dempsey's Fight Magazine.**

ACROSS THE RED DRIFTS AND MAIL-CLAD FORMS, TWO FIGURES GLARE AT EACH OTHER. IN THIS UTTER DESOLATION, ONLY THEY MOVE. SLOWLY THROUGH THE CORPSES THEY STRIDE, AS GHOSTS MIGHT COME TO A TRYST THROUGH THE GRAVEYARDS OF A DEAD WORLD. IN THE GROWING SILENCE, THEY STAND FACE TO FACE. BOTH ARE TALL MEN ... AND BUSKY LIKE TREES. BUT ONE OF THEM IS--
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
- SO THAT MY BROTHERS IN VALHALLA MAY KNOW WHO WAS THE LAST OF WULFHERE'S BAND TO FALL BEFORE THE SWORD OF AMALRIC!
STAN LEE
ROY THOMAS
BARRY SMITH

FOOTNOTES

[1]Howard, Robert E , & De Camp, L Sprague, **Conan the Usurper,** (Lancer Books New York 1967) pg 256

[2]Howard, Robert E., De Camp, L. Sprague, & Carter, Lin, **Conan,** (Lancer Books New York 1967) pgs 9-10

[3]Ibid , pg. 9

[4]Perry, Albert E , "A Biographical Sketch of Robert E Howard" from the collection of Glenn Lord (c) 1976 by Glenn Lord pg. 1

[5]Howard, De Camp, & Carter, **Conan,** pg 9

[6]Lovecraft, H.P., "Robert Ervin Howard. A Memoriam," from the collection of Glenn Lord (c) 1976 by Glenn Lord pg 3

[7]Perry, "A Biographical Sketch " pg 1

[8]Of all the famous writers of "heroic fantasy" with whom Mr Howard corresponded, E Hoffmann Price a one bore the distinction of meeting him in person

[9]Lovecraft, "Robert Ervin Howard " pg 2

[10]Howard & De Camp, **Conan the Usurper,** pg 70 ■

* A special note of thanks to Mr Glenn Lord, whose invaluable technical assistance has been deeply appreciated

Conan

CONAN

ISSUE #	DATE	TITLE	WRITER	PENCILLER	INKER	PP
1	10/70	*The Coming of Conan*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Dan Adkins	19
2	12/70	*Lair Of The Beast-Man!*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	19
3	2/71	*The Twilight Of The Grim Grey God*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	19
4	4/71	*Tower Of The Elephant!* *	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	20
5	5/71	*Zukala's Daughter* *	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Frank Giacoia	19
6	6/71	*Devil-Wings Over Shadizar*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	20
7	7/71	*The Lurker Within* *	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Dan Adkins/ Sal Buscema	19
8	8/71	*The Keepers Of The Crypt*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Tom Sutton/ Tom Palmer	19
9	9/71	*The Garden Of Fear* *	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	19
10	10/71	*Beware The Wrath Of Anu!*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	23
11	11/71	*Rogues In The House* *	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	34
12	12/71	*Dweller In The Dark*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Barry Smith	16
13	1/72	*Web Of The Spider-God*	John Jakes/ Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	22
14	3/72	*A Sword Called Stormbringer!*	Michael Moorcock/ James Cawthorn/ Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	21
15	5/72	*The Green Empress Of Melniboné*	Michael Moorcock/ James Cawthorn/ Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Barry Smith/ Sal Buscema	21
16	7/72	*The Frost-Giant's Daughter* *	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Barry Smith	12
17	8/72	*The Gods Of Bal-Sagoth* *	Roy Thomas	Gil Kane	Ralph Reese	20
18	9/72	*The Thing In The Temple**	Roy Thomas	Gil Kane	Dan Adkins	20
19	10/72	*Hawks From The Sea*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Dan Adkins	20
20	11/72	*The Black Hound Of Vengeance*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Dan Adkins	20
21	12/72	*The Monster Of The Monoliths!*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Dan Adkins/ Craig Russell/ Val Mayerik/ Sal Buscema	20
22	1/73	*The Coming Of Conan (Reprints #1)*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Dan Adkins	19
23	2/73	*The Shadow Of The Vulture!* *	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema/ Dan Adkins/ Chic Stone	21
24	3/73	*The Song Of Red Sonja*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Barry Smith	20
25	4/73	*The Mirrors Of Kharam Akkad* *	Roy Thomas/ Barry Smith	John Buscema	Sal Buscema/ John Severin	21
26	5/73	*The Hour Of The Griffin!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	20
27	6/73	*The Blood Of Bel-hissar* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	20
28	7/73	*Moon Of Zembabwei!* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
29	8/73	*Two Against Turan* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	20
30	9/73	*The Hand Of Nergal!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
31	10/73	*The Shadow In The Tomb!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
32	11/73	*Flame Winds Of Lost Khitai!* **	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
33	12/73	*Death And 7 Wizards!* **	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
34	1/74	*The Temptress In The Tower Of Flame* **	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
35	2/74	*The Hell-Spawn Of Kara-Shehr* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
36	3/74	*Beware The Hyrkanians Bearing Gifts..!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	19
37	4/74	*The Curse Of The Golden Skull* *	Roy Thomas	Neal Adams	Neal Adams	19
38	5/74	*The Warrior And The Were-Woman* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	John Buscema	19
39	6/74	*The Dragon From The Inland Sea!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	John Buscema	19
40	7/74	*The Fiend From The Forgotten City*	Michael Resnick/ Roy Thomas	Rich Buckler	Ernie Chua	15
41	8/74	*The Garden Of Death And Life!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	18
42	9/74	*Night Of The Gargoyle!* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	18
43	10/74	*Tower Of Blood* ***	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Ernie Chua	18
44	11/74	*Of Flame And The Fiend* ***	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Crusty Bunkers	18
45	12/74	*The Last Ballad Of Laza Lanti*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Crusty Bunkers	18
46	1/75	*The Curse Of The Conjurer!* ****	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Joe Sinnott	18
47	2/75	*Goblins In The Moonlight!* ****	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Dan Adkins	9
48	3/75	*The Rats Dance At Ravengard!* ****	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Dick Giordano/ Dan Adkins	10
49	4/75	*Wolf-Woman* ****	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Dick Giordano	18
50	5/75	*The Dweller In The Pool* ****	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Dick Giordano	18
51	6/75	*Man Born Of Demon!* ****	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Dick Giordano	18
52	7/75	*The Altar And The Scorpion* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Tom Palmer	18
53	8/75	*Brothers Of The Blade*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Frank Springer	18
54	9/75	*The Oracle Of Ophir!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Tom Palmer	18
55	10/75	*A Shadow On The Land!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Tom Palmer	18
56	11/75	*The Strange High Tower In The Mist!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Pablo Marcos	19
57	12/75	*Incident In Argos!* *	Roy Thomas	Mike Ploog	Mike Ploog	18
58	1/76	*Queen Of The Black Coast!* *	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Steve Gan	19
59	2/76	*The Ballad Of Bêlit!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Steve Gan	17
60	3/76	*Riders Of The River-Dragons!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Steve Gan	17
61	4/76	*On The Track Of The She-Pirate!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Steve Gan	17

Checklist

COMPILED BY
ROGER STERN

[illegible]	DATE	TITLE	WRITER	PENCILLER	INKER	PP
62	5/76	*Lord Of The Lions!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Steve Gan	17
63	6/76	*Death Among The Ruins!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Steve Gan	17
64	7/76	*The Secret Of Skull River!* *(reprinted from SAVAGE TALES #5)*	Roy Thomas/ John Jakes	Jim Starlin	Al Milgrom	19
65	8/76	*Fiends Of The Feathered Serpent*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	The Tribe	17
66	9/76	*Daggers And Death-Gods!*	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	The Tribe	17

KULL

	3/71	*The Skull Of Silence!* *(CREATURES ON THE LOOSE #10)*	Roy Thomas	Berni Wrightson	Berni Wrightson	7
1	6/71	*A King Comes Riding*	Roy Thomas	Ross Andru	Wally Wood	19
2	9/71	*The Shadow Kingdom*	Roy Thomas	Marie Severin	John Severin	19
	10/71	*The King And The Oak * (CONAN #10)*	Roy Thomas	Marie Severin	John Severin	5
	4/72	*Forbidden Swamp (MONSTERS ON THE PROWL #16)*	Roy Thomas	Marie Severin	John Severin	10
3	7/72	*The Death-Dance Of Thulsa-Doom*	Roy Thomas	Marie Severin	John Severin	20
4	9/72	*Night Of The Red Slayers*	John Jakes/ Gerry Conway	Marie Severin	John Severin	20
5	11/72	*A Kingdom By The Sea!*	Gerry Conway	Marie Severin	John Severin	20
6	1/73	*The Lurker Beneath The Earth!*	Gerry Conway	Marie Severin	John Severin	21
7	3/73	*Delcardes' Cat **	Gerry Conway	Marie Severin	John Severin	20
8	5/73	*Wolfshead **	Len Wein	Marie Severin	John Severin	20
9	7/73	*The Scorpion God! **	Gerry Conway	Marie Severin	John Severin	19
10	9/73	*Swords Of The White Queen!*	Gerry Conway	Marie Severin	Frank Chiaramonte	19
11	11/73	*King Kull Must Die!*	Roy Thomas	Mike Ploog	Mike Ploog	19
12	2/74	*Moon Of Blood!*	Steve Englehart	Mike Ploog	Sal Buscema	15
13	4/74	*Torches From Hell!*	Steve Englehart	Mike Ploog	Al Milgrom	15
14	6/74	*The Black Belfry!*	Steve Englehart	Mike Ploog	Jack Abel	15
15	8/74	*Wings Of The Night-Beast!*	Steve Englehart	Mike Ploog	Ernie Chua	12
16	8/76	*The Tiger In The Moon*	Roy Thomas/ Doug Moench	Ed Hannigan	Yong Montano	17
17	10/76	*The Thing From The Emerald Darkness*	Doug Moench	Ed Hannigan	Alfredo Alcala	17
18	12/76	*The Sorceror In The Swamp!*	Doug Moench	Ed Hannigan	Alfredo Alcala	17

GIANT-SIZE CONAN (adapting CONAN THE CONQUEROR)

1	9/74	*The Hour Of The Dragon **	Roy Thomas	Gil Kane	Tom Sutton	26
2	12/74	*Conan Bound **	Roy Thomas	Gil Kane	Tom Sutton	30
3	4/75	*To Tarantia And The Tower! **	Roy Thomas	Gil Kane	Tom Sutton	30
4	6/75	*Swords Of The South **	Roy Thomas	Gil Kane	Frank Springer/ Vince Colletta	30

RED SONJA (MARVEL FEATURE)

1	11/75	*The Temple Of Abomination!*	Roy Thomas	Dick Giordano	Dick Giordano	8
		Red Sonja *(reprinted from SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #1)*	Roy Thomas	Esteban Maroto	Neal Adams/ Ernie Chua	10
2	1/76	*Blood Of The Hunter*	Bruce Jones	Frank Thorne	Frank Thorne	18
3	3/76	*Balek Lives*	Bruce Jones	Frank Thorne	Frank Thorne	17
4	5/76	*Eyes Of The Gorgon*	Bruce Jones	Frank Thorne	Frank Thorne	18
5	7/76	*The Bear God Walks*	Bruce Jones	Frank Thorne	Frank Thorne	17
6	9/76	*Beware The Sacred Sons Of Set*	Roy Thomas	Frank Thorne	Frank Thorne	17
7	11/76	*Battle Of The Barbarians*	Roy Thomas	Frank Thorne	Frank Thorne	17

CONAN ANNUAL

1	1973	*Lair Of The Beast Men!* *(reprinted from CONAN #2)*	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	19
		*Tower Of The Elephant! **	Roy Thomas	Barry Smith	Sal Buscema	20
2	1976	*Phoenix And The Sword **	Roy Thomas	John Buscema	Yong Montano	34

* Utilizing material by *Robert E. Howard*
** Utilizing material by *Norvel Page*
*** Utilizing material by *David A. English*
**** Utilizing material by *Gardner Fox*

An interpretation of Red Sonja by Marvel newcomer, Marshall Rogers.

by Naomi Basner

Red Sonja. She-devil of the Hyrkanian Steppes. Son-ya to her sometime friend, Conan, and a score of unprintable names to those who have crossed swords with her.

Red Sonja she-devil with a sword!

As has been related elsewhere (SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #1 and MARVEL FEATURE #1), Sonja's literary predecessor was Red Sonya of Rogatine, a Russian hellcat who appeared in a *Robert E. Howard* story called "Shadow of the Vulture". This story was adapted in CONAN #23, introducing the Hyrkanian swordswoman to Marveldom—as well as to the Cimmerian.

The meeting was memorable in more ways than one.

Chased by Turanian troops to the beseiged Hyrkanian city-state of Makkalet, Conan was literally trampled upon by Red Sonja, as the

SING A

city's defenders stormed out the gates. This was to represent something of a trend in their relationship. She ignored his thanks for the rescue, pointing out that he had merely been in the way. That didn't prevent her from rescuing him a second time, though since Cimmerians *do* have their uses.

Conan was prevailed upon (*not* by an appeal to his better nature) to scale the wall of Makkalet's royal treasure tower, so that Sonja might steal a certain serpent-tiara for her employer, King Ghannif of Pah-Dishah. Unfortunately, this particular tiara had the nasty habit of turning into a real serpent unless the words "ka nama kaa lajerama" were spoken, and the two mercenaries were forced to fight the thing. It was eventually subdued and returned to a more manageable state, with which Red Sonja rode, leaving her 'partner" with a sore leg, a bruised hand, and a wounded ego from her clout to his jaw.

Just for the record, the above occured in CONAN #24's "Song of

Red Sonja", which won an Academy of Comic Book Arts award for Best Story of 1973.)

Consider now for a moment, the position of young Conan of Cimmeria. Granted, Sonja was a soldier, and a good one at that, but a woman's still a woman, right? Logical enough, only Conan hadn't taken into account the possibility that Sonja could be different from the women he had previously known. And how! "Drinks the strongest man under the table—and outswears a Zingaran! She's all men's delight—and no man's love." How does a naive barbarian deal with *that*?

Answer: he doesn't. At least, not in the manner in which he had intended to. Thus, Conan found himself battered and exactly nowhere (so to speak), as he tried to comprehend just what it was that made this warrior-woman unique.

her to Zamora's City of Thieves, and a reunion with Conan of Cimmeria. This was related in SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #1, as was the tale of Red Sonja's exile from Hyrkania. Conan apparently had found a bit of time to ponder, between wars and adventures, though he was still far from understanding Sonja. He greeted her as an old comrade, making one or two good-natured attempts at overfamiliarty, but not pressing the issue when spurned. They stayed in the city only long enough to battle an undead wizard, thanks to a false murder accusation from a tavern wench whose dignity Sonja had injured.

Immediately upon leaving the City of Thieves, they were ambushed by a gang of bounty hunters. Horse downed by an arrow, Sonja determined to make a lone stand,

Setting the tower afire, the pair left the hidden valley. Conan in no uncertain terms refused to leave Sonja to elude bounty hunters by herself, at which point she clobbered him with a rock. (Don't judge her too harshly—Cimmerians have notoriously thick skulls.) She then took the surviving horse, and put enough distance between them to keep him from "looking after" her, as he'd felt duty-bound to. Conan hadn't yet realized that Red Sonja valued her independence above all else.

Red Sonja eventually wandered into the Nemedian forest known as Darkwood, where she encountered a mad wizard who tried to sacrifice her to his dark gods; played "Little Red Riding Hood" with a conscience-stricken werewolf; and single-handedly slew a sect of murderous satyrs. All of this was chronicled in CONAN #48, KULL AND THE BARBAR-

SONG OF SHE-DEVILS

And Red Sonja? She rode straight to Pah-Dishah with the tiara, ready to claim the reward King Ghanmf had promised her. The problem was, his idea of a reward was an all-expenses-paid, lifetime stay in his harem, with a palaceful of guards to persuade her to accept it. So much for the honor of kings.

Not one to take such a situation lying down, Sonja went along until an opportunity to escape presented itself, in the form of an easily-accessible dagger and an overconfident King Ghanmf. He'd have done better to make sure that all weapons were well out of her reach, but Red Sonja's action insured that he would never make the same mistake again. It also created some difficulties for her, as regicide—however justified—was not something the new Hyrkanian rulers wanted to encourage. With a substantial price on her head, she left Hyrkania. At the gallop.

Ah, but what were a few bounty hunters to contend with, when the whole world beckoned?!

Sonja's journey westward brought

prompting her more practical companion to sweep her, protesting all the way, to the safety of a nearby bluff. One loose boulder later, the brigands ceased to be a problem. The two adventurers then strolled blithely out of the frying pan, and into the valley beyond a cleft in the bluff. (This and the following are from CONAN #'s 43 and 44.)

The valley surrounded a tower owned by a brother-and-sister team of vampiric sorcerers, Morophia and Uathacht, who needed fresh humans for blood and breeding. Conan and Sonja were quickly taken prisoner, although Uathacht—not overly enthused by the latter's presence—shoved her into a pit with a carnivorous creature which Conan was then obliged to kill. Yet it was Uathacht who placed a spell of immobility upon her brother, once the Cimmerian agreed to stay with her. At the last minute, though, she let her neuroses get the better of her and tried to kill Sonja, only to be slain by her own dagger. Sonja felt no remorse.

The woman-warrior supreme, drawn by artist Frank Thorne—who also, by the way, draws her book.

IANS #2, and MARVEL FEATURE #1. There was a fourth Darkwood Tale, as well, in KULL AND THE BARBARIANS #3, which finally revealed the origin of Red Sonja.

The story was told in flashbacks, triggered by Sonja's recognition of a man she had rescued from a trio of cutthroats. Five years before, that same man had ordered his mercenary soldiers to kill her father, mother, and two younger brothers, before ravaging her and setting fire to her home. Destitute, Sonja had managed to escape the burning cottage, and awakened to. . .a vision.

She saw an ethereal figure, neither male nor female, bearing a sword, who promised that she would be granted a warrior's strength, if she would vow never to love a man, unless he defeated her in fair combat. Sonja readily—and fervently—complied, the vision then touching her with the sword and vanishing. The resolve was seemingly tested almost immediately, as one of the mercenaries returned. Instead of a frightened, fragile peasant girl, he now faced Red Sonja—who that day made her first kill. And five years later? Sonja had also vowed to find and kill the nameless murderer of her family, but his mind had been destroyed by torture at the hands of the robbers. She found her revenge by leaving him as he was, without the mercy of a quick death.

Which might lead one to ask: with one vow taken care of, should the other still be valid? Sonja had almost wished, at times, that she could have a place in her life for "Womanish things", although she remained steadfast. It could be argued that *anyone* who'd been through her ordeal would see visions. On the other hand, in the Hyborean Age, magic worked and the supernatural was almost commonplace. It's possible that going back on her word would leave her an ordinary woman, "raising brats instead of hell". Still, whether the vision was real or imagined, Red Sonja yearned to perform heroic deeds—and a hero's life is a lonely one.

Strange as it seems to be speaking in the future tense about a past era, Red Sonja's relationships with others will most probably remain transitory. She will wander the lands of the West and the pages of MARVEL FEATURE, in essence alone, with another reunion with Conan to take place soon. Whether or not the Cimmerian has yet come to an understanding of her is yet to be seen. ■

KING KULL LIVES!

by Howard Zimmerman

In Robert E. Howard's short but productive life (1906-1936), he wrote a variety of pulp-magazine fiction; sport, detective, and Western adventure stories in addition to his tales of fantasy. When he wrote the story that singlehandedly created the sword-and-sorcery genre, it was a story of Kull.

The story, "The Shadow Kingdom", first appeared in WEIRD TALES in August, 1929. Set in the Pre-Cataclysmic Age of 18,000 BC, it featured Kull, a barbarian raised by tigers in the woods of his native Atlantis, and his defense of the throne he usurped in Valusia, greatest kingdom of the Thurian Continent. Howard filled the story with an air of mystery and intrigue, with sorcerous surprises exploding at the embattled barbarian when least expected.

WEIRD TALES quickly published a second Kull story "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune," but all additional Kull stories that Howard submitted were rejected.

In 1932, Howard sold his first Conan story, "The Phoenix On The Sword." This second-generation barbarian became an immediate hit and Kull was all but forgotten until 1966, when *Glenn Lord*, literary agent for the Howard estate, uncovered six dusty cartons of Howard's papers. In these he found ten unpublished Kull stories—seven finished and three incomplete. Among them was a story called "By This Ax I Rule." (A close reading and comparison reveals that this tale of King Kull was used as the basis for "The Phoenix On The Sword", the story that started it all for Conan!) *Lin Carter* finished the three incomplete stories and Lord published the whole collection in '67 under the title, *KING KULL*. Finally, the complete Kull legend was in print and his saga at an end. But not for long.

In 1970, Marvel entered the sword-and-sorcery field with CONAN THE BARBARIAN, which was very well received. A year later, with little (if any) fanfare, *CREATURES ON THE LOOSE* #10 appeared, its cover proclaiming the "The Coming of King Kull!" It featured a seven-page adaptation of Howard's "The Skull of Silence" written by *Roy Thomas* and drawn by that master of the macabre, *Bernie Wrightson*. Three months later *KULL THE CONQUEROR* #1 hit the stands.

In the first two issues, Roy presented his excellent adaptation of that most famous of Kull stories, "The Shadow Kingdom." These two books stand as a classic venture into the sword-and-sorcery field, besides being Roy's personal favorites.

In issue #1, "A King Comes Riding", we learn of Kull's strange odyssey through flashbacks that Roy adapted from Howard's "Exile of Atlantis." Raised from infancy by tigers in the forest, later found and adopted by the Sea-Mountain tribe, young Kull is forced to make a hasty

and untimely exit from Atlantis. Being chased by a blood-thirsty crowd he has just deprived of its grim pleasure (a young woman being burned at the stake for witchcraft), he dives into the sea and is picked up by a Lemurian pirate ship—where he is immediately chained to an oar as a galley slave. But pirates, too, must sleep and one night, as the ship lies anchored off the Valusian shore, Kull swims to freedom

Twists of fate carry Kull from mountain outlaw to Commander of Valusia's Black Legion, second in power to only Borna himself. The King, however, is a tyrant and there exists a conspiracy against his throne.

The four plotters convince Kull that Borna is about to disband the Black Legion, knowing that this will provoke him to challenge the King. In a short but savage fight in the throne room, Borna draws first blood, leaving Kull scarred for life from his right eyebrow to halfway down his cheek. But tiger-like reflexes (and a sharp knife) win the day for Kull and as Baron Kaanuub—legal heir to Valusia's throne and one of the conspirators—stoops to retrieve the fallen crown, Kull impulsively scoops it up on his sword and crowns *himself* King! The story also introduces from the Pictish Isles who becomes Kull's most trusted friend

Ross Andru and *Wally Wood* teamed up to do the artwork on that first, fantastic issue, *Marie* and *John Severin* taking over with the second issue and going on to become Kull's regular artists through the next eight issues

Issue #2, the conclusion of "The Shadow Kingdom", detailed Kull's and Brule's fight against humankind's ages-old enemy—and former rulers—the Serpent-Men.The action is fierce and deadly, all of it taking place under the velvet cloak of night. The shock of betrayal and deceit, the choking stench of foul sorcery, the clipped but foreboding narrative—all the elements of Howard's world combined with the Severin's vivid portrayals to produce a super-comic with super-potential

Ironically, *KULL* was summarily cancelled due to lagging sales from Marvel's 'other' sword-and-sorcery mag, *CONAN THE BARBARIAN*. Six months later, with *CONAN* doing better, Kull reappeared in a 10-page cover story in *MONSTERS ON THE PROWL* #16.

The story chronicled Kull's invasion of the "Forbidden Swamp" and his destruction of the Serpent-Men's temple. But Roy wrote it to introduce Kull's most effective and deadly opponent—not to mention one of the best villains Marvel has ever come up with: *Thulsa Doom*. Thulsa Doom, the immortal, skull-headed sorceror, conjurer of demons and cosmic evil and—who knows—possibly an ancestor of Victor Von (AKA Doctor) Doom.

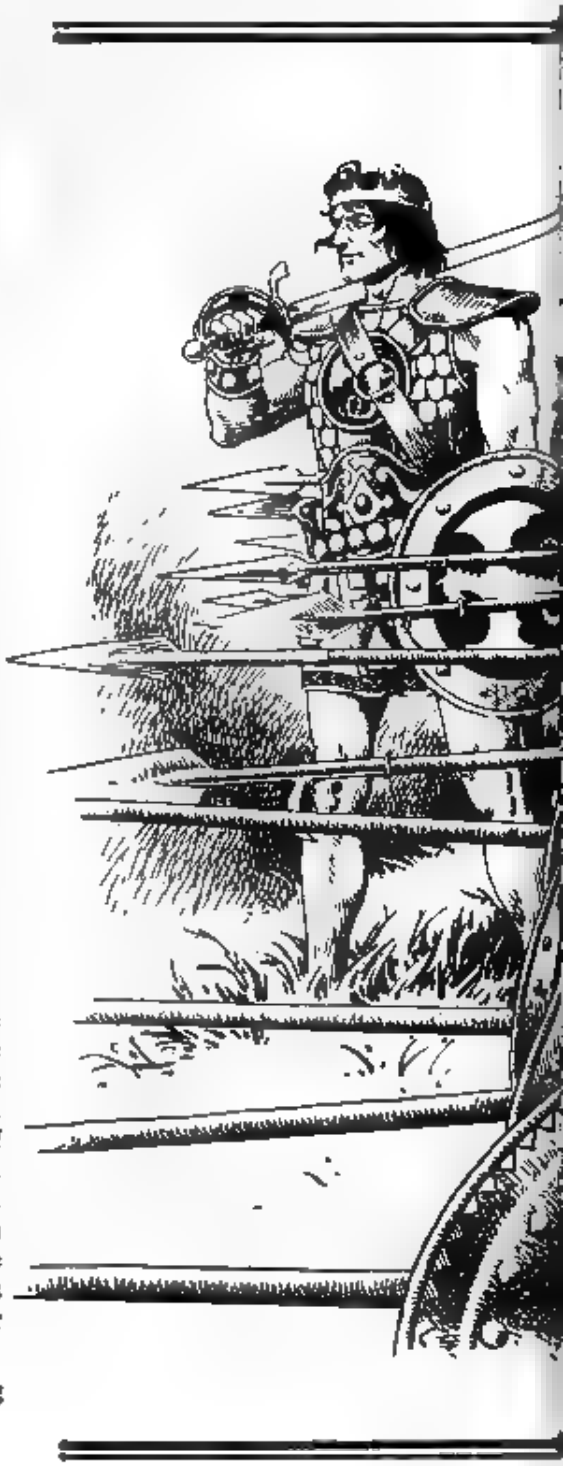
Roy continued this story a few months later in *KULL* #3, pitting the Serpent-Sorcery of Thulsa Doom against the Tiger-Totem of King Kull Unfortunately, Kull's instincts and strong sword-arm prove no match for the magician's arcane spells. In the end, though, even Thulsa Doom cannot control the inhuman powers he has summoned and Kull is triumphant, if only temporarily.

Gerry Conway took over the scripting chores with issue #4 "Night of the Red Slayers", with a plotting assist from sword and sorcery author, *John Jakes*. In true Howard tradition, Gerry's stories dealt with court intrigue and plots against Kull's throne aided by sinister sorcery. He continued the contrast between Kull the free-wheeling barbarian and Kull the brooding usurper-King, ever aware of the responsibilities of his position. Gerry also continued the "sword-*versus*-sorcery" theme in such mini-classics as "The Lurker Beneath The Earth" and "Delcardes' Cat".

Though the art was first-rate, and the stories faithfully continued the Kull legend, the book had subtly changed from its first two classic issues and sales were dropping. For one thing, the Severin's art had quieted down, become more civilized, leaving Kull looking more like Prince Valiant than Conan the Conqueror. This is not meant as a knock to their artwork or *Hal Foster's*; it's just that their fine kind of storytelling wasn't selling books. And somehow, Gerry's stories (even the Howard adaptations) were getting too complex, sometimes losing complete sight of Kull for awhile

Major changes were made starting with issue #11 of KULL, now called "The Destroyer!" Roy was back as writer/editor and he had decided on a new direction Robert E. Howard's most successful Conan stories concerned Conan's being deposed from his throne and his subsequent quest to regain it. Roy chose to adapt Howard's own story of how *Kull's* kingship is usurped. "By This Ax I Rule!" To illustrate this new chapter in the Kull saga, Roy chose artist *Mike Ploog*.

The book is action from cover to-cover. The plot centers upon the same four men who maneuvered Kull into attacking Borna They now



plot against Kull's rule, guided by a fifth mysterious outsider named Ardyon. Ploog's portrayal of Ardyon as a "Ming the Merciless" look-alike is a dead giveaway: this is Thulsa Doom in human disguise! Here Kull is pictured at his most savage—bare-chested, barefoot, and bloodied, dealing death swift and sure with his broad ax. But again, he is no match for unholy sorcery and he falls, as Thulsa Doom sneeringly dons his crown which mystically transforms itself into a Serpent's crest! Kull is dethroned and sentenced to death

Roy had found a successful formula. Although *Steve Engelhart* wrote the next four issues and Ploog's pencils had four different inkers, sales were picking up. Readers were interested in Kull's attempt to regain Valusia's Topaz throne and finally defeat Thulsa Doom, even though the number of pages per story were cut and reprints were added to the books. Roy had also made a change in Kull's supporting characters. He wrote Brule's part down and brought back Ridondo, the sharp-tongued minstrel who had initially belonged to the plot against Kull. Ridondo made a better counterpoint to this tight-lipped barbarian bent on bloody revenge than did the savage Spear-Slayer

Yet issue #15 was, as the cover stated, "A Barbarian's Last Battle!" Citing the then acute (and still ongoing) paper shortage—as well as insufficient sales—Stan and Roy announced the cancellation of KULL. But the letters page also announced the coming of Kull's very own black-and-white magazine, KULL AND THE BARBARIANS. *The King is Dead! Long live the King!*

The first issue, May '75, reprinted the two-part "Shadow Kingdom" and the excellent adaptation of "The Valley Of The Worm" by Roy, Gerry, *Gil Kane* and *Ernie Chua*.

Issue #2 featured a new 26-page Kull story, "The Teeth Of The Dragon" by Gerry and *Jess Jodloman*, which picked up the story from KULL #15. In addition it contained a Berni Wrightson frontispiece of Solomon Kane, plus a sorcerous tale of Kane in Africa with art by *Alan Weiss* and *Neal Adams* and a story of Red Sonja drawn by *Howie Chaykin* with Thomas scripts in both stories. As a total package it is probably the best sword-and-sorcery comic that has ever been done, in color or black-and-white.

In the third issue *Doug Moench's* script continues Kull's search to find an army to join him in battle against Thulsa Doom. *Vicente Alcazar* drew the most visually exciting Kull yet in the story called "The Omen In The Skull," which ends with Kull and Ridondo in Atlantis, dogged by Doom's deadly magicks, having just discovered the most startling mystery ever to confront the barbarian ex-king. And although that is no place to end a story, that indeed was the end. When Marvel cut back its black-and-white line last year, KULL AND THE BARBARIANS got caught in the squeeze.

Kull the King, by Marie and John Severin.

But this is not a eulogy for Kull; as the title of this article implies "King Kull Lives!" Roy realized that this is too good a character to leave on the shelf and so he is hard at work on the next full-color Kull comic.

Doug Moench is writing the first book off a Roy Thomas plot, and *Ed Hannigan* will do the pencils with inks by Philippine artist, *Yong Montano*. Ed's work will be familiar to PLANET OF THE APES readers and Yong has already worked on a few Conan stories, so he should feel right at home. For those of you who missed the first classic issues, Kull's story will be re-presented through flashbacks. If Roy has his way, Doug, Ed and Yong will be the regular team for the book which is scheduled to make its (re)appearance this May.

So cheer up and keep a sharp eye; King Kull is alive and well at the house of Marvel and if the Fates are kind, he'll be around for a long, long time. ■

A Marvel artistic double-treat—two views of Conan the Barbarian by artist Marshall Rogers: and below the climactic final page of CONAN THE CONQUEROR (SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #10).
by John Buscema

DEPARTMENT OF INFOORMATION!

And now, an exclusive preview of one of the eagerly-awaited origins in the modern Marvel era, that of STORM! (The full details of which can be found in X-MEN #102). Anyone care to figure out just what's going on...?

EVERYONE IS GOING THROUGH CHANGES ... an explanation of sorts.

As you can already see, the Department of Infoormation looks radically different this issue – and there's a reason for that. Hoo-boy, is there ever a reason! Ya see, what with Marvelous *Mary Wolfman* stepping down as editor to devote more time to writing, Gallopin' *Gerry Conway* returning to the fold, and the ever-amazing *Archie Goodwin* taking over as the Bullpen's brand new head honcho, things have been in a state of confusion to say the least. Writers and artists have been shifting back and forth so fast that our poor armadillos have been run ragged just trying to figure our who's doing what, where, when and how! So, in order to set things straight – both for us and for you – we have compiled the mighty-G majestic MARVEL SCORECARD! You literally can't tell the players without one, friends!

Now, you may notice that the SCORECARD lists only the title of the feature or book, the writer, and penciller. "What about the inker?" you may ask. Well, the truth is simple, folks. As we put this issue of FOOM to bed, we're not certain just who is inking what! Oh, there are some certainties: John *Joe Sinnott* will, of course, continue to apply his brush to the ol' FF and Timorous *Terry Austin* will be putting down the indelibles over most of *Al Milgrom's* work. But, as we said, things are in a state of confusion still. And rather than give you some information that might change five minutes after we go to press, we'd rather leave ya guessing. After all, why should you know more than we do?

Okay, now that the SCORECARD is straightened away, let's break for some news, and then we'll move on to our list of coming Marvel Attractions:

WHO WAS THAT DUCK I SAW YOU WITH? It seems that the whole, wide, wonderful world of Marvel is in love with Howard the Duck – so much so that the fabulous fowl will soon be coming your way every thirty days! Yes, as of HOWARD THE DUCK #8, HTD's book will go monthly! And, if you had trouble finding Howard's first issue, then look no more! We've got the answer to your problem, and it's the HOWARD THE DUCK TREASURY EDITION #1! In an unprecedented move, Mighty Marvel will be reprinting HTD #1, as well as the bombastic bird's earliest appearances from the MAN THING strip, and his early solo strips from GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING. All of this, plus twenty pages of *all-new material! Waaaggghh!*

THE WORLD STILL NEEDS CHAMPIONS And, Howard is not alone in his newly inaugerated monthly status! THE CHAMPIONS will also be hitting the stands every thirty days, as of the ninth issue of their mag. As Artful Archie Goodwin says (see our exclusive interview, elsewhere in this issue), group books are doing better than ever! First the INVADERS... and now, the CHAMPIONS. But definitely Marvel is the group leader.

HI, WE'RE THE NEW KIDS! 1978 is starting to show more and more evidence that Marvel is still on the move! First came the ETERNALS, then, the man called NOVA! And now we've got two more dynamite mags comin' your way. The first, on sale in September, is PETER PARKER – THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN! Yes, now Spidey will be coming your way three times a month – in his own amazing mag, in MARVEL TEAM-UP, and now .PETER PARKER – THE SPECTACULER SPIDER-MAN, a great, new, monthly mag written by that *old* Spidey-scribe, *Gerry Conway*! And that's not all, true believers! Gerry will also be writing another new Marvel mag, premiering in October the long-awaited MS. MARVEL! Who is she? What is she? Conway knows, but Conway's not telling! Watch the Bullpen pages and the next issue of FOOM for more details.

SOMETHING OLD AND SOMETHING NEW Followers of WEIRD WONDER TALES, our far-out fantasy mag, will soon be in for a real treat. Way back in the early days of Marvel, *Smilin' Stan* and *Jolly Jack* created an occult guardian called *Dr. Droom*. But the good doctor faded off into limbo while the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, and Thor took the limelight and literally changed the face of comics history. Well, we recently found those early stories, and we'll be reporting them in the pages of WEIRD WONDER TALES ..in a way. We're bringing him back as DR. DRUID ...so as to prevent any confusion with a certain Latverian monarch. And if you are one of the lucky few who might have some of those early issues of the original AMAZING ADVENTURES that featured the Doc's adventures, you'll want to pick up on these "new presentations." You'll find that DR. DRUID is really something else!

MY NAME IS ARCHIE GOODWIN. I AM A COMIC BOOK WRITER
OFTEN, WHEN MAKING AN APPEARANCE IN PUBLIC I AM ASKED:
HEY! HOW DO YOU THINK UP ALL THEM CRAZY COMIC BOOK STORIES?
NOW, THROUGH THE KIND AUSPICES OF THE ACADEMY OF COMIC BOOK ARTS
--I AM ABLE TO REVEAL EXACTLY HOW I THINK UP THOSE CRAZY STORIES
OF COURSE FOR THE REALLY TOUGH ONES. I USE TWO HANDS.

Infoomation Interview

COMPILED BY
ROGER STERN

Over the past decade, the name **Archie Goodwin** has come to stand for the best in comics. As a writer, an editor, and an artist Archie has at one time or another handled each of the various genres of comics stories—from war to humor, from westerns to super heroes. He has worked in both black & white and color comics with equal ease and ability. And somehow he has managed to find time to co-produce the SECRET AGENT CORRIGAN comic strip with *Al Williamson*.

At Marvel, the premiere issues of IRON MAN and LUKE CAGE bore his distinctive touch. And until recently the multi-talented Mr Goodwin held the editorial reins of Marvel's black & white magazines.

In April, Archie assumed the role of editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics. Nearly a month later, we sat down with him over lunch, and discussed the recent turn of events.

FOOM Archie, it goes without saying that this year has been a hectic one so far There's been a change in the editorship: you might even say that there's been a small change in the editorial method Roy Thomas, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Jack Kirby, and Gerry Conway are now all writer/editors —in charge of their own books, as it were. You, on the other hand, are the editor in-chief of the entire line. Just how does this arrangement relate to your job?

ARCHIE: Well, essentially, I'm working with the writer/editors more or less as a coordinator Naturally, what with the concept of a Marvel continuity, a sense of coordination is very important to us—much more important than for other companies. So, as editor-in-chief, I keep them informed as to what other writers are doing, keep them aware of what's going on in the rest of the line. I offer them advice if they need it, and I take some from them if I need it. On the rest of the books—those handled by our freelance writers—my associate editor, Jim Shooter, and I work with the individual writers to determine the directions those books should go. And, of course, I'm responsible for the covers on all of the freelancer's books.

Also, I work with Stan on the development of new projects. And I'm there to handle the individual problems that continually crop up when you're publishing anything juggling schedules, figuring out personnel, and such

FOOM What would you say is your biggest challenge as editor-in-chief?

ARCHIE: Right now, it's getting the books on schedule. That *has* to be our biggest challenge Here, it's not a situation where a new editor has to come in and make a dramatic turnaround in terms of what the books are doing. As a company, as a line, Marvel is doing well. It's just that over the past three years, we've expanded into the biggest comic book company going. Consequently, we now have the problem of getting it all on schedule. There have been cases at the other companies where a lot of books were down in sales, and an incoming editor was faced with making drastic changes. Happily, that's not the case

here. Throughout the expansion we've maintained a good deal of continuity. Like I said, the books are doing well; it's mostly the schedule that's suffered. So, basically, we'll be entering a bit of a stabilization period now. A handful of the poorer selling books will be dropped and be replaced by some ideas we've got.

FOOM: The super-hero has, of course, always been Marvel's big draw. But we have experienced many variations of themes over the past few years—monsters and the supernatural, sword and sorcery, kung fu. What's next?

ARCHIE: Well, I think we're experiencing the beginnings of the next trend right now. Obviously, there's very much a swing towards super-hero groups. They seem to be doing very well. Of course, Marvel has always had a history of being a leader when it came to groups, what with the Fantastic Four and the Avengers. More recently, there's been the success of the Defenders, and now the Champions, whose book is about to be made a monthly. It's indicative of a very strong trend.

Also, it's evident that the entire industry is getting interested in tie-in material—adaptations or translations of properties from other media. We've done well with PLANET OF THE APES, and we'll soon be bringing out 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, and PRISONER books. We'll have to wait and see how successful they are.

One of the good things about Marvel is that whenever there is a trend, we don't *just* cash in on it. I mean, obviously we'll move on it in a commercial manner; that's why we're in business. But we always leave our mark, and to a certain extent, that trend becomes incorporated into the Marvel style. It was true in the case of Shang Chi and Iron Fist. In addition to being martial arts characters, they've also evolved as definite Marvel characters in the Marvel style. I think it was true with the Werewolf and Dracula. We found ways to incorporate them into the line. Now with the tie-in material, it'll be more of a challange, seeing how it'll fit in... how it'll work and be received.

FOOM: Personally, do you have any major plans for the future of the line... or any pet projects?

ARCHIE: Not at the moment. If anything, I think I'll be picking up on things that had more or less already been started. For one thing, we're already moving on the decision that the books should strive to be more entertaining. We'd thought that perhaps the books had gotten a little grim over the years... that we'd gotten a little overly realistic on the morbid side. I think that there's a need to reemphasize the fact that comics are an entertainment medium. Not that I intend to make the books vacuous or anything like that... only to make the comics more of the wonderful, entertaining things that they really are.

FOOM: Inflation has hit the comics as hard as anybody. Now we're publishing 17-page books that sell for thirty cents. Do you forsee anything new in the way of packaging?

ARCHIE: Yeah, I think the people at Cadence—Jim Galton, Stan—are all interested in seeing new packages. Right now, we're watching the annuals very closely. I think the 50¢ size seems like our next viable alternative beyond the regular size comic. And I think an important sales test will be Roy's new WHAT IF? book. It's an exciting concept, and it's going to be very a very good test of the 50¢ size. Plans right now call for it to be a bi-monthly book as well. I'm interested in seeing how it goes over.

FOOM: Recently, we've begun to package the $1.50 treasury books with all-new material—the CAPTAIN AMERICA BICENTENNIAL BATTLES book and 2001.

ARCHIE: Right. We're certainly watching to see how the readers react to those books. In fact... well, I suppose it could change, but we presently have plans for a treasury-sized 3-D book to be released around Christmas time, and plans call for it to be mostly original material. That's another experiment we'll be watching.

FOOM: You've worked in both black-&-white books and color comics. How much difference is there in your approach to color comics as opposed to the approach you give a black-&-white?

ARCHIE: Oh, a good deal of difference. I don't think we always achieved it, but I think a black-&-white requires an entirely different layout approach...a little more open and freewheeling layout. Black-&-white magazines should ideally have more experimentation with technique. With color books you are obviously working *for* color, so the inking is more straightforward. Inking in a black-&-white will, of course, be more detailed, with a greater emphasis on rendering. That's the basic difference. And, of course, that's the ideal.

FOOM: Archie, you've been a writer, an artist, and an editor. Given an absolute freedom of choice, which would you prefer? Writing, drawing, or editing?

ARCHIE: I'd like to be able to do them all. Ideally, if I were a much better artist, I'd like to write, draw, and edit my own work. Maybe do just one comic, but do it all myself! Unfortunately, the kind of drawing I do is more in the humorous vein... and my writing tends more to the dramatic style. So there's really no way I could ever draw my own material. I would really miss being able to write or work with a dramatic comic.

FOOM: Speaking of humor, HOWARD THE DUCK seems to indicate a market for more humor. Do you think we'll be seeing more humor in the comics?

ARCHIE: I think it's possible. Of course, a lot depends on HOWARD's long-run acceptance, but the response we've gotten on the initial issues has been very encouraging. And depending on an overall continued success... sure, there's going to be more experimenting with humor. Although, again, I've felt that one of the strengths of Marvel was the touch of humor in the dramatic titles. There's a good deal of it, particularly in SPIDER-MAN. In a recent issue, for instance, Len had him fighting the Spidey-mobile. It's done dramatically, and the character was caught up in a serious situation, but there were sequences that had me laughing out loud. And I think this mixture of serious drama and absurd humor is part of our success.

FOOM: Archie, when you were the editor of the black-&-whites, you were overseeing six books. What's it like to make a jump like that?

ARCHIE: Frightening. In the past I've always been in a position of editing not much more than five or six titles, so I could exert a very tight control. Now, of course, it's a different situation, and any control has to be sort of gradual and overall and mostly related to terms of direction. Fortunately, Jim Shooter is really very efficient and a very good associate editor. He's very important in that regard—as are Roger Slifer and Scott Edelman—all of our assistant editors. Right now, we've divided the books up, so that each assistant editor is overseeing a certain number of titles, and can devote concentrated attention to those titles. And that kind of support really makes it all possible. It certainly keeps me from going bananas! ■

Archie Goodwin

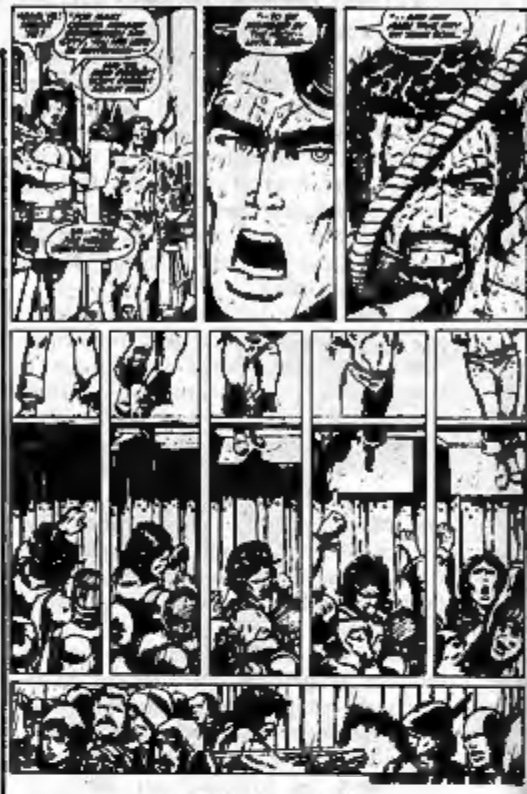
MARVEL WRITER/ARTIST SCORECARD

For the nostalgia buffs in the audience, the cover of CONAN'S award-winning 24th issue, "The Song of Red Sonja" (cover art by Barry Smith)...

...and, the splash page of that self-same issue (the credits speak for themselves).

TITLE	WRITER	PENCILER
AVENGERS	Gerry Conway	George Pérez
BLACK PANTHER	Jack Kirby	Jack Kirby
CAPTAIN AMERICA	Jack Kirby	Jack Kirby
CAPTAIN MARVEL	Gerry Conway	Al Milgrom
CHAMPIONS	Bill Mantlo	John Byrne
CONAN	Roy Thomas	John Buscema
DAREDEVIL	Marv Wolfman	Gil Kane
DOC SAVAGE	Doug Moench	Tony de Zuniga
DOCTOR STRANGE	Marv Wolfman	Craig Russell
ETERNALS	Jack Kirby	Jack Kirby
FANTASTIC FOUR	Roy Thomas	George Pérez
GHOST RIDER	Gerry Conway	Gil Kane
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY	Steve Gerber	Al Milgrom
HOWARD THE DUCK	Steve Gerber	Gene Colan
HULK	Len Wein	Sal Buscema
INHUMANS	Doug Moench	George Pérez
INVADERS	Roy Thomas	Frank Robbins
IRON FIST	Chris Claremont	John Byrne
IRON MAN	Gerry Conway	George Tuska
KULL	Doug Moench	Ed Hannigan
MARVEL TEAM-UP	Bill Mantlo	Sal Buscema
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE	Marv Wolfman	Ron Wilson
MASTER OF KUNG FU	Doug Moench	Paul Gulacy
MS. MARVEL	Gerry Conway	
NOVA	Marv Wolfman	Sal Buscema
OMEGA	Steve Gerber	Jim Mooney
PETER PARKER – THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN	Gerry Conway	
PLANET OF THE APES	Doug Moench	
POWER MAN	Marv Wolfman	Lee Elias
RED SONJA	Roy Thomas	Frank Thorne
SONS OF THE TIGER	Bill Mantlo	George Pérez
SPIDER-MAN	Len Wein	Ross Andru
SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP	Bill Mantlo	
THOR	Len Wein	John Buscema
TOMB OF DRACULA	Marv Wolfman	Gene Colan
WEREWOLF BY NIGHT	Doug Moench	Don Perlin
WHAT IF?	Roy Thomas	Jim Craig
X-MEN	Chris Claremont	Dave Cockrum

A new view of an old (though not that old) character: Conan the Babe-arian, courtesy of Marvel face-fronter Paul Clifton.



Plus, two examples of fine comic book story-telling: the death of Burgun, from CONAN #10 ("Beware the Wrath of Anu!"–Thomas/Smith/Sal Buscema)...

...and the death of the woman-thing known only as Zhadorr, from CONAN # 41 ("The Garden of Death and Life!"–Thomas/John Buscema/Chua).

KNOW YOUR BULLPEN

Associate Editor *Jim Shooter* is our gracefully aging former boy-wonder of comics, having broken into the business at the ripe old age of thirteen. Now nearing the end of his first quarter-century, Jim is looking forward to hardening of the arteries, loss of hearing, and a general decay of his motoor reflexes. An integral part of the editorial staff, Jim acts as right-hand man to Editor *Archie Goodwin*, overseeing plot-lines and straightening out all manner of hassles. Jim is also the tallest editorial Bullpenner, standing a whopping big six-foot-seven. His hobbies are bumping into low hanging objects and retrieving small children's kites from roof tops.

No, that's not the Apache Kid! That's Assistant Editor Numero Uno, *Roger Slifer*! It's the Roguish One's job to sit in the corner and catch all the mistakes that Shooter missed.. and any errors that might have cropped up in the inking or lettering stages of a book's production. Rog is also the editorial color man (as opposed to the editorial *off*-color man) and he often seems to vanish from his desk, only to reappear moments later in the offices of our far-flung, hidden Coloring Department with his list of corrections. Well, he doesn't actually vanish. What he does is turn sideways. A slender gent, Roger can often be found on Halloween wearing a pair of extra-long shoes and masquerading as the letter "L".

Sparkling *Scott Edelman*, another of our Assistant Editor types, gave up not one, but two college careers to join the mighty Marvel Bullpen. Like Roger, Scotty gets the original pages of our modern-day masterworks to check over for mistakes. Mr. E is the staff costume expert, and he can often be found behind his desk, tearing out great mounds of hair over a disappearing glove or an incorrect belt. But all of that adversity has nothing whatsoever to do with Scott's tendency to jump out of airplanes. He actually enjoys it! We worry about Scott, but as long as he keeps agreeing to use a parachute, we're not gonna give him any trouble about it. 'Specially since he's a former FOOM editor! And besides, he's bigger than we are!

You may not believe it, but behind that calm, reserved—if somewhat fuzzy—exterior lurks a calm, reserved punster known as *Roger Stern*. We have, however, trained him to respond to the name "Sterno" so as to avoid confusion with the aforementioned Mr. Slifer. Sterno is the editor in charge of our rollickin' reprint titles...which may in part explain why he is always repeating himself. A real double-threat man, Sterno also rides herd on the armadillos who create our liltin' letters pages. Before coming to work for Marvel, Sterno wrote for FOOM for nearly a year. Now he's doing it again. And we're gonna keep making him do it until he gets it right!

And, by the way, if your subscription to F.O.O.M. is about to run out, or--heaven forfend--you don't have a subscription to begin with, or--finally--*you* have a subscription but you also have a friend who doesn't and would like one very much. . .*well then*, just fill out the following subscription blanks and send 'em winging our way via the US Postal Service. (And, this being the Bicentennial Year an' all, the Postal people might even *deliver* 'em!) We think you won't be disappointed, and, whatever happens, we *know* you won't be bored.

Next Issue:

Howard the Duck!

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